

**“SCHREIBEN WAS HIER WAR”**

**BEYOND THE HOLOCAUST-PARADIGM: (RE)POSITIONINGS OF JEWISH  
SELF-IDENTITY IN GERMAN-JEWISH NARRATIVES PAST AND PRESENT**

by

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This dissertation examines the stakes of self-Orientalizing in literary and cinematographic texts of German-Jewish cultural producers in the context of Jewish emancipation and modernization. Positing Jewish emancipation as a trans-historical and cultural process, my study traces the poetic journey of a particular set of Orientalist tropes from 19<sup>th</sup> century ghetto stories to contemporary writings and film at the turn of the millennium to address a twofold question: what could this problematic method of representation accomplish for Germany’s Jewish minority in the past, and how do we understand its re-appropriation by Germany’s “new Jewry” today. To explore this nexus, I employ an analytical framework that draws on Orientalist discourse theory and postcolonial theories of cultural and ethnic identity. While the works under consideration execute the Orientalist aesthetic in distinctly different ways and under different historical conditions, they tap into the same representational archive when functionalizing the polarized East/West geography and inherited cultural stereotypes about Jews such as the “Oriental Jew”, the “ghetto”, and the “Oriental cult.” I argue that these tropes not only come with a long history in articulating Jewishness, but that they are reanimated by Jews themselves to write the Jewish narrative of the present. Their reintroduction into the realm of fiction after decades of absence signals a paradigm shift in representations of Jews in Germany, where the Holocaust has been the uncontested framing element in the discourse of Jews and the ultimate reference point for

German-Jewish identity since the 1940s. As the shift accompanies generational and compositional change within Germany's Jewish community, it comes with emancipatory consequences. Rather than having a trimming effect on the menu of identifications, I contend that strategies of self-Orientalizing are a resource to make newly meaningful the Jewish historical experience and challenge the constraints of a Holocaust-based identity for Jews living in Germany today. The changes in Jewish self-identity this dissertation expounds also provide a model for analyzing the struggle against normative ascriptions of identity of other minorities in contemporary Europe whether self-imposed or by others.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

With the words “schreiben was hier war”<sup>1</sup> (“writing what’s going on here”) Maxim Biller, in his self-portrait *Der gebrauchte Jude*<sup>2</sup> from 2009, tersely proclaims the tenor of his project as a Jewish writer in today’s Germany. The brevity of his statement, however, belies the complexity of the task. Long considered the ultimate reference point and the lens through which Germans and Jews have seen one another ever since, the Holocaust continues to frame and complicate any attempt at discussing “what’s going on here.” Representations of the German-Jewish relationship have typically relied on a script written by the first and second generation of Holocaust survivors, and thus on a conceptual framework firmly in the grip of the Holocaust paradigm. It would seem only logical to expect Biller to follow the tacit pattern and established etiquette in narrating a German-Jewish reality. Yet, this author chooses to veer from the protocol by experimenting with a representational repertoire unfamiliar in the German postwar context. By contrast, Biller’s archive is indebted to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Jewish discourse of modernization and emancipation and derives much of its content from the Orientalist imagination so ubiquitous at the time. Although the Holocaust remains an important factor,

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<sup>1</sup> The literal translation of “schreiben was hier war” should read in the past tense (“to write what was going on here”). However, because the statement implies writing about the past *and* the present, I chose to translate it in the present continuous tense.

<sup>2</sup> This title suggests a double entendre, since the word “gebraucht” in German may be translated as “needed” or as “used”, allowing for two possible translations: *The needed Jew* and/or *The used Jew*.

even in Biller, his work indicates that the reliance on this category no longer sufficiently explains the mood and perspective of his own, younger generation. This crop of third generation German Jews, I contend, is looking to realign the German Jewish discourse to better reflect the vicissitudes and vagaries of life in present-day Germany. As a result of their search, the coordinates of the German-Jewish relationship intersect with pasts in need of being read as part of a larger German-Jewish discourse, beyond the Shoah. In transcending the limits set by a normative and reductive focus on the rupture brought about with Auschwitz, Biller's bold voice serves as my dissertation's inspiration and point of departure in mapping out and examining un- or underexplored connections to other discourses in works by German-Jewish literary and filmic authors, past and present. Given my claim of the centrality of Orientalisms in the texts of many younger German-Jewish cultural producers, this dissertation traces the practice of Jewish self-Orientalization, which has historically haunted the process of Jewish modernization and is now making an extraordinary return in descriptions of a German-Jewish lived reality today.

The prism of Jewish self-Orientalization refracts a host of cultural dynamics that are – while not unique – special to Germany and deserving of closer inspection. If audiences and Jewish writers elsewhere may be comfortable with self-Orientalisms in cultural texts by Jews,<sup>3</sup> the practice constitutes an unorthodox and troubling aesthetic device in Germany. Indeed, tropes such as the “Oriental Jew” and the “Eastern ghetto” could neither be invoked, nor could they be rehearsed other than within the parameters of German-Jewish Holocaust discourse after 1945. The proscription against their use should come as no surprise, considering that these tropes had

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<sup>3</sup> One good example is Woody Allen's filmic texts, wherein we find the stereotype of the Oriental Jew on comedic display. Or, more generally, audiences in the US are familiar with American-Jewish humor poking fun at the idiosyncrasies and particularities of Eastern European Jewish culture.

been instrumentalized in the struggle of Jewish emancipation throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century only to be placed in binary opposition to the enlightened and modern non-Jewish Germans and their bourgeois living space. As a result, the “Oriental Jew” and his “Eastern ghetto” congealed in the negative cultural stereotype and were functionalized in the identificatory schemes of various historical actors, the most notorious of whom were the Nazis. In the postwar years then, the ghetto Jew and traditional forms of Jewish life went largely missing from public discourse and sight since a complicated mechanism of repression had rendered them invisible. Their uncanny reappearance in literature and current popular culture violates implicit standards of representing Jews in Germany since the postwar era. My study shows that these tropes are becoming prominent fixtures on the German cultural terrain, and are recruited to make visible again what the Holocaust paradigm had eclipsed: the historical richness of the Jewish experience; the multiplicity of identifications for Jews; the internal dynamics of Jewish identity formation; lines of continuity rather than rupture; but also, more generally, the Jewish participation in and contribution to the Western discourse of Orientalism.

Thus, while the tropes of the Oriental Jew and the ghetto are used to write contemporary German-Jewish history, the Orientalist aesthetic also comes with a long history in defining Jewishness. This history further tells us that rather than being an exclusive tool in the hands of the dominant and therefore non-Jewish culture alone, as we may suspect, figures associated with Orientalism actually circulated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century narratives of German-Jewish writers who adopted and manipulated them to serve their particular interests. My inquiry documents the Oriental Jew’s literary journey: from Leopold Kompert and Karl Emil Franzos’ 19<sup>th</sup> century ghetto story to filmic and literary texts from the turn of the millennium more than one hundred years later, in the works of directors Dani Levy and Alice Brauner and writer Maxim Biller.

These texts, though embedded in specific historical moments and executing the Orientalist aesthetic in distinctively different ways, are united by joint features that come to bear in the repeated citation of a set of common tropes of Jewishness. Rather than simply serving as stylistic devices to propel the plotline or satisfy the voyeuristic inclinations of a gentile audience, my study demonstrates that these recurring tropical representations fulfill an important function. They are made productive to negotiate Jewish emancipation – a historical project that continues to be relevant for Jews in Germany today. By appropriating and recycling the Orientalist archive, these artists engage with problematic historical stereotypes, allowing them to intervene in the present German-Jewish discourse in newly meaningful ways. The reintroduction of Orientalized Jewishness becomes a technique to reset the trajectory for Jewish self-understanding today and launch alternatives outside of the post-Holocaust norm.

Pervading the literary and filmic imagination of a number of works from disjointed moments in history, Orientalisms are thus the determining criteria in my selection of works. All of the texts I include share structural, rhetorical, and imagistic ties with the Orientalist tradition, despite the gap in time between their conception and reception. While they exist within a rich landscape of textual production by German Jews, they represent a particular strand of artistic practice and attitude amidst others. Their common representational vocabulary forms a through-line spanning time periods separated by the most chasmal event in German Jewish history, the Holocaust. Indeed, the Holocaust and its aftermath have effectively eroded any attempt at narrating the Jewish experience outside of its shadow, and have issued a lasting challenge to our representational tools. Theodor Adorno's dictum from the late 1940s that "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric" condenses the problem in a nutshell: the Holocaust, in Maxim Biller's

words the “grössten Ungerechtigkeit der Welt,”<sup>4</sup> has engendered a profound skepticism towards all literature about it and its effects. Voiding summarily the literary devices and modes of inherited and accepted representation, the Holocaust also rendered invalid the Orientalist aesthetic from 19<sup>th</sup> century literary discourse. Thus, its reintroduction into the realm of fiction – and of Jewish fiction at that<sup>5</sup> – after decades of obliteration along with the recuperation of aspects of the Jewish experience from well before the Nazi slaughter certainly draws attention and begs scrutiny. My own inquiry is driven by the following framing questions: What could this particular and controversial method have accomplished for those writers yesterday, and what does it make available to these producers of cultural texts today? Put differently, what is the vector of this artistic practice as a period phenomenon and contemporary trend?

At this point, it is useful to revisit our notion of emancipation and how it applies to the Jewish cause across several time periods. We should bear in mind that the Jewish emancipatory enterprise in 19<sup>th</sup> century Central Europe and its core issue of securing civic parity for Jews not only harbored a wide range of expectations on behalf of the Jewish populations but also generated many different visions of how to reconcile Jewish particularity with Enlightenment notions of universality, as Paul Mendes-Flohr (3-7) points out. And, while emancipation is a term some narrowly define as a political effort, it is also an umbrella term that describes the brokering taking place on the socio-cultural plane, where Jews have positioned themselves in a

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<sup>4</sup> “the biggest injustice of this world” (Biller)

<sup>5</sup> The writing of fiction in German to talk about Jewish issues reemerged only quite recently, right around the time of the disintegration of the old East-West blocs as Erin McGlothlin contends in her discussion “Writing by Germany’s Jewish minority”.

myriad of constellations vis-à-vis the dominant culture.<sup>6</sup> In fact, we may say that Jewish emancipation never was just about gaining political rights. From the outset, it raised difficult questions about identity altogether, challenging Jews to find ways to express their positions, often times in opposition to one another.<sup>7</sup> This broader notion of emancipation beyond the strictly political best describes the multi-pronged approach to negotiating Jewishness that we observe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – a definition that promises to capture the problems at stake for Jews in Germany at various historical moments.

Now, the focus on the Orientalist aesthetic threatens to dislodge the meaning or prominence of other factors historically playing a role in the process of Jewish identity formation – factors we’ve come to privilege and accept as formative. With this in mind, I acknowledge that the use of the Orientalist aesthetic in cultural texts by German Jews is one method amongst others to navigate Jewish emancipatory claims – a method that arguably has not been fully considered, or that has been folded into the different narratives of Jewish modernization as it raises uncomfortable issues. The 19<sup>th</sup> century constructs of “the Jews of the Orient” (Mendes-Flohr 40), with their “Oriental ways,” were a point of contention among the Jewish intellectual leadership in their discussions of how “to accommodate Judaism to the ‘spirit of the age’” (Mendes-Flohr 158), and have thus appeared in debates over inner-Jewish religious reform since Mendelssohn’s era, around 1800. Drafted into a tense argument over

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<sup>6</sup> Hans Schütz (23) in *Juden in der deutschen Literatur* gives a review of the “Erfahrung der unheimlichen Doppelbödigkeit deutsch-jüdischer Existenz” (“the experience of the uncanny ambiguities of German-Jewish existence”) as articulated in scholarly and literary texts.

<sup>7</sup> An analysis of the different perspectives Jews adopted to envision their emancipation seems to characterize any scholarly discussion about European Jewry in the wake of the Enlightenment. Good examples can be found in the essays in the *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture: 1096-1996*, edited by Sander L. Gilman and Jack Zipes, and published in 1997.



Jewish assimilation into the dominant culture, the traditional Eastern Jew embodied, for many Western Jews, the antithesis of their efforts to socially and culturally integrate. This division is amply documented in scholarship, Steven E. Aschheim's (3) book *Brothers and Strangers* (1982) remaining one of the most comprehensive examinations of "the idea of the Ostjude ("Eastern" Jew)". Alternatively, notions of the "Oriental foreign people" (Hess ML 84) inspired calls for Jewish cultural reform from gentile politicians, theologians, and social engineers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century – at times with a view to encouraging Jews to assimilate, at others with a view to ultimately denying Jews the capacity to become "German."<sup>8</sup> Thus, these scenarios describe the ways an Orientalist gaze was projected onto the Jews without, however, giving consideration to the possibility that Jews functionalized that very gaze on their own terms – a form of appropriation promising outcomes different from those suggested elsewhere.

Instead of being merely the object of Orientalisms and the target of those "typical encapsulations" Edward Said (58) considers their trademark, German Jews also took on this discourse to promote an emancipatory agenda beyond the political. My study posits the emergence of the activity of self-Orientalizing in response to the Jewish minority's interpellation in Orientalist discourse during the 19<sup>th</sup> century emancipation project. Scrutinizing a gaze typically considered a means to map out a restrictive social category, this inquiry illustrates how its paralyzing force weakens when appropriated by the minority. Where Said relies on evidence from majority literature to make his argument, I look through his lens at the textual production by the Jewish minority. By switching the perspective, the authors under

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<sup>8</sup> The early debates about Jewish particularity and how to make Jews productive members of Prussian society, held by Prussian civil servant Wilhelm von Dohm and the Protestant theologian Johann David Michaelis in the late 1700s, illustrate my point. Where von Dohm argues in favor of Jewish assimilation, Michaelis only sees the supposed inherent incapacity of Jews to be anything but "morally, politically and even physically 'degenerate'" (Hess 3).

discussion in this study bring to the fore a much bigger issue for all factions involved in the Jewish modernization project: the instability and internal dividedness of identities altogether.

Prior to outlining each of the three chapters, I want to elucidate the theoretical underpinnings of my argument. This project draws on postcolonial criticism to develop an analytic framework suited to explore the play with the Orientalist aesthetic that undergirds and conjoins Jewish literary and cinematographic texts from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> centuries. My approach is predicated on Orientalist discourse theory and postcolonial theories of ethnic and cultural identity and alterity. While recent scholarship on minority studies derives much of its analytical force from postcolonial theory and is applied in the academic debate about Germany's minority populations of today, postcolonial thought was long deemed unfit for discussions about German pre-colonial and colonial engagements with the Other. As it emerged with reference to the exemplary dimension and reality of the French and British colonial empires, it mostly failed to recognize Germany's role and impact.<sup>9</sup> Due to the belatedness and the brevity of the German colonial encounter during the late 19th century imperial era, the German example seemed to lack the intricate interplay between colonial experience, knowledge, and power that characterizes French and British overseas ventures and informs much of colonialist theory.

However, the consideration of this theoretical apparatus for the German context gained currency with the revised understanding of colonialism introduced by Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, and followed by Susanne Zantop's *Colonial Fantasies*, in 1997. Said's groundbreaking work and Zantop's insightful Germany-specific adaptation changed

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Said's *Orientalism*, for example, largely ignores German investments in the Western project of knowing and Orientalizing the Oriental.

significantly how we think about colonial projects and practices. In fact, the debate experienced a veritable turn once scholars began to study colonialism as a discursive practice (an analysis for which Said's work was paramount) and as possessing an imaginary component not contingent upon the actual possession of overseas territories or factual economic exploit alone. Following Said's lead, Zantop applied the critique of knowledge production about the West's Other to the German context and theorized such discursive modes of knowing and conquering as colonial fantasies in *precolonial* Germany. From her point of view, we come to understand German 19<sup>th</sup> century culture as the manifestation and eventual institutionalization of a system of beliefs and values not necessarily tied to colonial experience in the conventional sense. Rather, Germans actively participated in the generation of knowledge about the Other by way of narrative emplotment of factual and fictional information in travel literatures, novels, ethnographic accounts, popular writings, and scientific studies in order to carve out, in their minds, a privileged space for themselves. This notion would lead to the construction of "a national identity in opposition to the perceived racial, sexual, ethnic, or national characteristics of others, Europeans and non-Europeans alike" (Zantop 7) well before the short-lived, active phase of colonial contact physically informed German dispositions vis-à-vis the Other.<sup>10</sup> Inherent in this view was the undisputed superiority of the German culture and people; due to the shortness of factual foreign colonization by Germany, these assumptions were not confronted by the realities of becoming familiar with the Other during extended interpersonal occupation.

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<sup>10</sup> Zantop (9) asserts that "imaginary colonialism anticipated actual imperialism, words, actions."

The emphasis on German colonialism as a form of discourse and a question of culture is critical for my own study. Often labeled “colonialism without colonies,” “internal colonialism,” “continental colonialism,” or “informal colonialism”, it serves to discuss the uniqueness of the German situation and bring into view German Orientalist and colonialist projections on minority groups within Germany and Eastern Europe.<sup>11</sup> Here, I take a further cue from Russell Berman (EE 15), who defines colonial discourse as “the articulation – description, narration, and recollection – of colonial experience” to say that “the complex reality of colonialism leaves its marks in the intricacies of colonial discourse.” Favoring the “social expressions of shared experience” (EE 14), he maintains that the particularity of the German case displayed “alternative possibilities within the Enlightenment and, more importantly, quite different approaches to alterity” that allowed for “transgression, mixing, and plurality” (EE 15). Uniting the various arguments is the accommodation of the impact of the imagination and of different kinds of experience – a critical step towards understanding the importance of the “cultural and ideological penetrations” Berman posits and which I observe in the literature and films at the center of my project. An important aspect thus concerns the formation of individual and collective practices and dispositions that structure the laws by which mentalities are conditioned. Pierre Bourdieu argues that the structures of a given cultural environment produce particular, cultivated dispositions that become permanently inscribed in mentalities and bodies. According to him, this form of permanent dispositions, “habitus,” is the product of history, but also produces history and provides the framework within which subjectivities are constructed. Bourdieu’s notion of dispositions and habitus can be traced in the work of scholars of German

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<sup>11</sup> Sheldon Pollock (77) insists that in the German case, the movement of Orientalist knowledge was “directed inward – toward the colonization and domination of Europe itself.”

history and civilization, who are directing their attention to “colonialism’s effects on German self-perception and on developments in German culture” (Christian 15) and who appreciate German colonialism not only as material practice but as a European, national, and local project at the level of culture.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the notion of German “colonialism” takes on new meaning, suggesting that Germany produced its very own brand of colonialism with its very own line-up of players, formed by the forces of its very own cultural terrain.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it challenges us to be mindful of the importance of German culture and its impact on all of those within its sphere, including on minorities. Following this logic, the Jewish minority, living within the German sphere of influence, would have developed and cultivated its dispositions within the schemes spawned by

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<sup>12</sup> Most recent research continues to add critical chapters to the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century colonial narrative, extending it into the post-war period in Germany. While its focus lies outside of literary analysis and caters to colonial aspects of Nazism to put Nazi genocide within a broader frame of inquiry, the narrative suggests that Orientalist knowledge infected and shaped German mentalities. It would sway German approaches not only towards the African Other, but also towards its internal Others, including the Jews. To emphasize the webbed relationality of factors, Birthe Kundrus (GC 31) asserts that “colonialism is a phenomenon that is always simultaneously global, European, national and local” (Kundrus GC 31), thus echoing Todd Kontje’s claim, with reference to canonical German literature, that “German Orientalism was directed both outward and inward, motivated by a desire to conquer as much of Europe and the rest of the world as possible and to eliminate racial ‘inferiors’ within.” Similarly, Sheldon Pollock (77) insists that in the German case, the movement of Orientalist knowledge was “directed inward – toward the colonization and domination of Europe itself.” Following on this idea, Kristin Kopp’s research traces the history of German discursive colonization of Poland to argue that the relationship between Germans and their Polish and Slavic neighbors was conceptualized in colonial terms. Kontje (207) raises the point that “the Nearest East of Poland becomes a testing ground for what is portrayed as a specifically German form of colonialism.”

<sup>13</sup> Scholars in German Studies have wrestled with a definition of German colonialism. Labeling the field using plural forms does best justice to the problem of identifying a category that escapes a facile explanation and is plagued by vagueness: terms such as “Germany’s colonial pasts,” “German Orientalisms,” Berman’s “Sekundärkolonialismus” (secondary colonialism), or simply “colonial discourses” capture the plurality and heterogeneity of colonial situations, practices, and realities that are generally observable and specifically applicable in the German context.

German history. A range of dispositions and subject locations are conceivable and perceptible. Serving different ambitions, we witness the Jews' alignment with the dominant culture and an assimilationist agenda on the one hand, but also resistance to assimilation pressures and thus to social and cultural renewal in its Western orientation, on the other hand. This study premises such tension and locates a particular method of intervention precisely in the Jewish minority's negotiation of Orientalist and colonialist attitudes.

Accordingly, my first chapter examines the way Jews appropriated Orientalism's logic in their 19<sup>th</sup> century emancipatory struggles. This approach distinguishes itself from other research<sup>14</sup> in several ways. Even if scholarship holds clues for an evolving pattern of a colonial-style dynamics between Jews and Germans since the Enlightenment, it distills the idea that Jews wrestled against those Orientalist projections, which regulated expectations and perceptions of the minority. It reads their dynamics as an instance of those asymmetries and the "ethnisierende Inferioritätsaxiom"<sup>15</sup> that Herbert Uerlings judges to be at the core of colonial discourse – a concept that, in fact, could readily explain the German-Jewish relationship in much of modern history. Rather, I maintain that Jewish writers did not merely see themselves as targets of Orientalizing visions, but that they wrote in this German idiom to reinscribe a practice aimed at

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<sup>14</sup> Among the scholars are Jonathan Hess, David Sorkin, Leo Riegert, Todd Herzog, and Susannah Heschel.

<sup>15</sup> "ethnizing inferiority axiom"; Herbert Uerlings, in *Kolonialer Diskurs und Deutsche Literatur: Perspektiven und Probleme*, asserts the importance of the "ethnisierende Inferioritätsaxiom" in colonial discourse. Dissimilarity being both a problem of ethnicity and inferiority, he leaves open the question of whether ethnicity is based on mythical, religious, historical, biological, or cultural differences, or, respectively, if inferiority is to be understood in theological, technological, environmental, or biological terms. The axiom can take on paradigmatic dimensions when dictating the field of hierarchizing oppositions in a collective, and when structuring the symbolic practices of the culture within which the collective operates. Cautioning us to consider the correlation between discourse and historical, collective / individual, and real experience, Uerlings emphasizes the interplay between situated actors and received knowledge.

controlling the Other, even turning it into a resource to advance the cause of Jewish modernization. Driven by the experience of a shared social world in a historically asymmetric constellation, they put to the test identity's presumably "natural," essentialist qualities.

My argument rests on the concept of Orientalist discourse in Said's sense in order to analyze the colonialist Western gaze Jews adopted and manipulated. I employ the concept of colonialist discourse to talk about those notions of developmental differences that take Orientalisms as their point of departure to then construct a system of racial and biological hierarchies.<sup>16</sup> Even though the idea of internal forms of colonialism stretches our imagination, I claim the usefulness of this model as a means to capture the analogy between German attitudes vis-à-vis the colonial Other overseas and minority groups in Germany and Eastern Europe. The notion of internal colonialism allows me to argue that, on the one hand, the Jewish minority constituted Germany's internal Other for quite some time (especially since the Christianization of Europe); on the other hand, Western Jews operated from within that same mindset they helped create when they searched for the Other in their Eastern peers.<sup>17</sup> Projecting the

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<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel in *Colonialism A Theoretical Overview* identifies two decisive elements at the core of colonialism. For one, he emphasizes the idea of domination and that of cultural dissimilarity between colonizer and colonized, a binary opposition built into the relationship and determining the master / servant dynamics. In Osterhammel, cultural dissimilarity is rooted in structural terms in European cultural superiority and in interpretative terms in ideological justifications such as civilizing the barbarians or savages, or bringing salvation to the heathens. He also calls the different forms of racism – be they theologically, technologically or biologically motivated – “the ultimate version of the difference axiom” and considers colonial discourse the locus where these categories are negotiated and circulated.

<sup>17</sup> Todd Kontje, in *German Orientalisms*, points out that Jews, along with Poles, are cast as an Oriental presence in Europe and are associated with the East, as in, for example, Gustav Freytag's novel *Soll und Haben (Debit and Credit)* (1855), and thus within a space Kristin Kopp identifies as discursively colonized. Existing notions of dissimilarity between Germans and Poles were transferred to Eastern Jewry.

equivalent of colonial fantasies of cultural dissimilarity onto the ghetto Jew, they proved the ubiquitous dialectic of self and Other an internal struggle amongst the Jews of Europe.

At this juncture, Homi Bhabha's theory of colonial anxieties afflicting the self / Other dyad and regulating the complex economy of identity between the two is helpful for my analysis. Bhabha theorizes this economy around the concepts of the cultural stereotype, ambivalence, mimicry, and the uncanny. All of the concepts operate on the assumption of a shared dynamics, where both parties depend on each other, i.e., on their "doubles," for their self-understanding. However, Bhabha's postulate of colonial doubling goes further. What makes it relevant for my project is the meaning it takes on in contemporary texts, in which various forms of doubling and repetition function as reminders of the past. An examination of this relationality leads me to speculate that Kompert and Franzos' 19<sup>th</sup> century literature functions as a precedent to the contemporary texts I discuss in chapters two and three. Possessing palimpsestic properties, they become a reference point for writing the Jewish narrative of the present, hinging yesterday and today in ways beyond the Holocaust paradigm.

At the beginning of my three chapters, I will situate each literary and filmic author in the specific context of his time, not only to describe the moment that generates these texts, but also to compare and contrast each author within his respective peer group and flesh out signs of distinction between their voices. It seems important to also point out a parallel in the historical context for the emergence of these voices. Both, the application of the Orientalist gaze in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its resurfacing in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century are embedded in landmark events that signal a pivotal turning point in German national history. For my earlier authors, the arduous path to unifying the many German states, small and large, into a singular nation state – with the declaration of the German Empire in 1871 as its culminating moment – forms the political



backdrop to their writing. Notably, an integral part of this political project of unification proved the forging of a common national consciousness and identity – a project that called upon Germans to conjecture their difference from all others in uniquely and exclusively “German” terms. Public discussions inspired thinking in categories along ethnic and racial lines that would arguably lead to essentializing notions of national identity. It is in this overall climate that German-Jewish writers interpreted their own positioning, performing a tightrope walk between cultural and ethnic allegiances.

Fast-forwarding into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet another unifying event at the national level provided the context for my later authors: German reunification in 1989/’90 marked the birthdate of the “new Germany,” paving the way for the emotionally charged process of the political and cultural merger of East and West. This event, too, was the result of the unquestioned perception that there is such a thing as Germanness distinct from the Other and thus uniting and overriding separate political boundaries. Ever since, public debates have been wrestling with the complexities of this transformation and weighing its benefits against the economic and social costs of an integration that for some could not arrive quickly enough, but for others was contemplated with critical distance and skepticism. As all Germans, irrespective of their ideological emplacement, found themselves faced with the challenge to consider the impact of reunification on German identity and Germany’s place in the post-unification European order, the Jewish minority felt this challenge with particular urgency as they did not neatly fit within this perceived separate and internally consistent culture. Reunification accelerated, I contend, the “process of reassessment” of Jewish life in Germany that Karen Remmler and Sander Gilman (6) believe to have been underway since the mid-1980s. The articulation of this process in German-Jewish literature and film, bringing into representation a

changed reality for the Jewish minority and its effect on Jewish subjecthood, becomes the focus of my second and third chapters.

My first chapter focuses on selected works by the two 19<sup>th</sup> century authors, Leopold Kompert and Karl Emil Franzos, both of whom claimed Jewish family roots in the Eastern reaches of the Austrian Empire, and who realized their career paths in the capitals of Vienna and Berlin, respectively. Credited with inventing a new genre of Jewish writing, the “ghetto story,” Kompert and Franzos are among the acculturated Austrian and German Jews for whom the elimination of “any sign of the ‘Ghetto Jew’” (Ben-Ari, 147) seemed of foremost concern. The traditional Eastern ghetto, the embodiment of backwardness and civilizational want in the Western mind, serves as the target of their distinctly emancipatory projects, and experiences its transformation by way of fictionalization. While each author produces a uniquely different picture of the ghetto, both appropriate the Orientalist gaze, manipulating it to recast the Oriental ghetto and traditional Jewishness for their particular purposes with the overarching goal of generating new visions for Jewish identity.

Initially, this gaze would appear myopic, if not blinding, given the scope of Orientalism and the inherent objective of establishing a system of authority over the Other. If we accept its premise as a hegemonic discourse that constitutes Western thought, then we can understand how Jews entrenched in Western culture found themselves negotiating a rhetorical arsenal that turned the Eastern ghetto into what I describe as a “German-Jewish Orient,” an inferior space mandating Western civilizational intervention. Kompert, for one, performs the work of Edward Said’s classic Orientalist, for whom the domestication of the foreign is one of the distinguishing features in his economy of representations. Kompert takes this task of narrating the unfamiliar in familiar categories quite seriously: not only does he apply German cultural norms to his

depictions of ghetto life to close the presumed gap between the world of the shtetl and the gentile world, but his characters and ghetto appear to fuse with the norm. By fashioning the traditional ghetto into a sanitized Orient populated by Jews who are endowed with the same characteristics as the German bourgeois middle class, Kompert actually disengages the negative cultural stereotype from its referent. The stereotype's immutability from Orientalist discourse is offset by the potential for change that Kompert's self-Orientalizing makes available to his Jews. Rather than supporting the "ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" that Said (42) claims and which Kompert's Eastern Jewish / modern Western dichotomy of space appears to exemplify, his Orientalist gaze instead collapses the very binaries that buttress Orientalism's scaffolding.

If Kompert's creation of a sanitized German Jewish Orient assumes the unwillingness of his peers to settle in fixed categories, Franzos – only a quarter of a century later – extends the underlying notion of Jewish identity as flexible and fluid. No longer operating within the Orientalist tradition alone, he sutures the interests of colonialist discourse to the cause of Jewish modernization and emancipation. In his version of Jewish ghetto fiction, we recognize the Western imperative to care for and "elevate" those in need of "maturation" and growth known from imperial Germany's colonial projects overseas. Rallying support for a civilizing mission in the Eastern shtetl communities, Franzos draws up a dismal picture of his ghetto Jews in their state of civilizational lack. However, instead of believing this kind of civilizational "wilderness" to be the consequence of some biological or racial fatalism, as is the case in attitudes vis-à-vis Africa, Franzos projects colonialism's civilizing claim, however flawed it was in theory and praxis, on the Eastern Jewish surface. He relies on the emancipatory promises for the individual that are held out by German educational ideals to turn these Eastern Jews into Jewish Germans.

Importantly, Franzos' acculturated Jews are the facilitators of the transformation process, and are entrusted with the task of educating their peers. It is through the lamination of two seemingly incompatible objectives – locking the Other into structures of ethnic and developmental hierarchies, versus advocating the Other's ability to break out of those very structures – that Franzos introduces a post-humanist perspective of identity. Using the language of choice and empowerment, he subverts interpretations of both Germanness and Jewishness as rigid and fixed at the very moment in history when Germans are busy regulating the terms of membership to the German national community.

In my second and third chapters, I leapfrog over the era of the two world wars and the years leading up to German reunification in 1989 to examine the links I understand contemporary Jewish authors to have forged with 19<sup>th</sup> century ghetto fiction. This jump emulates the historical developments: For one, the interwar years saw a high level of assimilation of Western Jews during the Weimar Republic alongside growing racial anti-Semitism in which the stereotypes of Jews played a prominent role. Secondly, after 1945 and until the 1980s, the Holocaust was the undisputed benchmark for Jewish representations. Positing the appropriation of Orientalisms in my authors in chapters two and three, I show how they instrumentalize the stereotype to disrupt routine frameworks of representing and interpreting Jewishness in Germany since 1945. Their approach challenges the Holocaust as the exclusive point of reference and the accepted sway it held over cultural productions on the Jewish subject matter in Germany for decades. Rather than catering to the needs of the generation of Holocaust survivors and their tactics of invisibility, these authors use the Orientalist aesthetic as a vehicle for encoding topical issues – issues plaguing Jews from different generations and backgrounds – and for calling for greater visibility of Jews in

Germany. Here, I draw on the extensive scholarly literature on contemporary German-Jewish cultural productions to bolster my overarching research trajectory.

My second chapter concerns itself with the prose of Maxim Biller (\*1960). I approach his body of work under the assumption that the collision of discourses past and present injects thrust and meaning into the narrative prose discourse<sup>18</sup> of the Jewish postwar experience. In my discussion, I concentrate on several aspects of Biller's strategy as a writer, as well as how his voice fits into the larger German socio-political context, to analyze the new literary idiom I believe him to have launched. Sequencing and pairing historical and contemporary events and figures from German-Jewish encounters in unexpected and unlikely combinations, Biller develops a representational model that decenters the linearity of German and Jewish history. Consequently, he calls into question our understanding of the German-Jewish relationship of today. An integral part of this rhetorical technique, I argue, is his textual reference to the Eastern ghetto. The stereotype of the Oriental Jew, along with other markers of Orientalized Jewishness, constitutes an overlooked, yet driving force in his oeuvre. In Biller re-emerges a tradition in Jewish writing I have already traced in Kompert and Franzos, when he opens up, in literary form, a space that had long been missing from the map, and which the films by Dani Levy and Alice Brauner visually access through their cinematographic expeditions.

This move into the Jewish past before the world wars that Biller's imagination initiates comes at a turning point in Germany's national fortune: it coincides with the fall of the wall and the collapse of the Soviet Empire in 1989. A momentous venture, the break-up of the old East / West configuration unlocked the geographic space of the Eastern shtetls. It restored to the

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<sup>18</sup> I'm borrowing the term "narrative prose discourse" from historian Hayden White and his notion of historiography as a "verbal structure" that arranges events and processes by way of argument and tropic "emplotment."

Western consciousness the very sites of traditional Jewish life that had been lost with the Holocaust and subsequently wiped from memory under communism's state-sponsored policy of atheism.<sup>19</sup> Biller, from a German-Jewish perspective, makes semantically available this process of political and cultural opening up. In so doing, he taps into a representational archive that had been banned from our vocabularies. Coincidentally, Biller's invocation of this archive parallels the imageries West Germans have used to describe their relationship with their East German brethren. As West Germans discovered their Other in the East German and dealt with the frustrations of the unification process, the German-German relationship became articulated through the language of colonization – a rhetorical move that would establish the supposed backwardness and inferiority of the easterner vis-à-vis the westerner.<sup>20</sup> As Biller reconnects with the shtetl past, bringing into view the figure of the Oriental Jew as the Jewish analogue of Eastern backwardness, he performs a similar imagistic maneuver. It serves, I argue, to inspect the asymmetries in the inter-generational relationship between Jews in postwar Germany and also those between the dominant gentile culture and the Jewish minority.

Biller's poetic operation is risky and puzzling and bound to offend the sensibilities of Jews and gentiles alike. It favors a model of identification that seems unsuitable for a recovery, and stands in sharp contrast to those models we have favored ever since the Shoah. The impulse to re-ethnicize his Jewish characters by way of self-Orientalizing only draws attention to their otherness and brings into contamination seemingly incompatible images of Jewishness.

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<sup>19</sup> Ruth Ellen Gruber in her article *Beyond Virtually Jewish: New Authenticities and Real Imaginary Spaces in Europe* (2009) discusses the folkloristic and virtual approaches to rediscovering former Jewish life in Eastern Europe since the 1990s.

<sup>20</sup> Andreas Glaeser (7), in *Divided in Unity*, examines "the experience of otherness between east and west Germans" that plays out in complex identification processes in social situations, not least of all in language.

However, I maintain that Biller's literary voice defies Western Holocaust decorum and the Eastern refusal to engage in Holocaust discourse. Moreover, it makes visible the ghetto existence of Jews in Germany today – a self-inflicted ghetto, according to Biller – and produces a profoundly skeptical vision of the German-Jewish world. In a sweeping gesture, he thus protests all mechanisms put in place to negotiate or represent the Jewish experience, and challenges us to recognize what had been erased or bracketed. Unsettling the Holocaust-paradigm as the foundation for Jewish identity in his writing since the late 1980s, Biller emerges as a transitional author who bridges the post-Holocaust era of the Bonn Republic and the era of the Berlin Republic. His fresh approach comes with a trailblazing effect on the cinematographic artistry of German-Jewish film directors in the Germany of the 2000s. The analogies I submit suggest that the films discussed in my third chapter build on Biller and his agenda, yet benefit from a more positive receptional climate when challenging the politics in the representation of Jewishness.

Chapter three focuses on the visual reappearance of the Oriental Jew on the movie screen. It analyzes and compares Dani Levy's *Alles auf Zucker* and Alice Brauner's *So ein Schlamassel*, the former a 2005 feature film, the latter a German television production from 2008. Both films provide a window into the popular imagination and discourse. They impart images of Jews vastly different from those most Germans know through official Jewish and non-Jewish institutional organs and sources of information. The German-Jewish world of today they capture is characterized less as a home to the Holocaust survivor than as a highly contested space where an increasingly heterogeneous Jewish collective, with a transnational character, competes over singularly ascribed rules of belonging.

Executed under the magic of the Orientalist imagination, *Alles auf Zucker* builds on the German reunification rhetoric in the wake of 1989. The film thematizes inner-Jewish differences – differences that had largely been ignored or silenced by the accepted Jewish mandate of standing united and keeping a low profile in the public arena in the postwar years. Where Kompert and Franzos had framed the pivotal question of German-Jewish subject formation within the logic of the polarizing East / West paradigm, Levy, too, finds inspiration in this East / West geography and the cultural dynamics the division historically engenders. The significant shift in focus and imagery we thus observe in the returning figure of the Oriental Jew and all he stands for marks a taboo-breaking practice in visualizing Jewishness on the German cultural screen and becomes part of a paradigm shift. These figures are recruits from the past, drafted from a pool of Jewish targets who, over the course of the process of Jewish modernization, were considered unfit to be included among the ranks of emancipated German Jewry. However, far from merely reproducing old stereotypes and thus rekindling prejudice against Jews, Levy composes an Oriental genre tableau that serves to assemble – and, eventually, to unmask – the whole gamut of Jewish types imaginable. He restores on the German-Jewish screen those characters that had been relegated into a visual void by the Jewish postwar narrative. As a result, Levy's colorful palette of Jewish characters not only reintroduces a set of strange and unfamiliar Jews, but it is functionalized to bring into representation the masquerade about authenticity Jews in Germany seem to have been compelled to perform – a masquerade in place since the influx of Russian Jews, arriving after the fall of the Soviet Empire, challenged the self-understanding of Jewish communities across Germany.<sup>21</sup> My

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<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey Peck (52) in *Being Jewish in the New Germany* (2006) discusses the “issue of authenticity” he observes in the tensions between the established Jewish Community in



discussion demonstrates that Levy's humorous cinematographic approach actually tackles serious questions about German-Jewish identity in the new millennium, only to propose a more dynamic model of identifications.

Alice Brauner's *So ein Schlamassel* extends Levy's canvas and fills in areas it had left blank. In her contemporary family story from Berlin, Jewish religious rituals and traditions motivate much of the causal logic of the film's plot line. Levy's hyperbolized, figurative types are replaced by a set of lovable, upper middle-class, and ordinary Jewish characters pressed to preserve and uphold their Jewish identity in a world where being Jewish remains not only exceptional but imminently compromisable. Here, the "Oriental cult" becomes the vehicle by which to critically raise concerns over the rigid and exclusionary identification mechanisms – and the ghetto walls they help to erect and maintain – that are still in place today. The self-essentializing tale that Jewish religious rituals and life cycle events, by definition, must always tell is put to the test when a self-contained Jewish family unit experiences not only external threats to its coherence and lineage, but internal conflicts as questions about its pedigree arise. Both the intrusion by the daughter's *goyishe*, i.e., non-Jewish, boyfriend, and the rupture in the family's genealogical cycle that a paternity dispute between another daughter and her child's father mark, create anxieties about the bloodline and unravel the very fabric of Jewry's legend of descent.

Combined, these filmic texts work against received assumptions of a monolithic Jewish culture of Holocaust victims, establishing a matrix of identifications that exceeds all previous models and that houses multiple, conflicting positions. Staging the present by way of recycling figures and tropes from the past, the films provide a platform from which to reassess Jewishness

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Germany and the newly immigrant Russian Jews and their claims to Jewishness.

and those social and ethnic commandments that traditionally organize and sustain Jewish life. While the films can be read as examples within an overarching discourse of Jewish modernization, I believe them to also throw open the problematic question of “normalization”. A volatile political term in the German context, it is a particularly sensitive one for Germany’s Jews. Adopting the Jewish perspective, the films yet propose a different kind of normalization. Borne from an investment in a more fluid interpretation of Jewishness, “normalization” describes a desire among a younger generation of Jews for relationships between Jews and non-Jews, and amongst the community of Jews in Germany, that are less scripted, as well as less strained. In this sense, the films offer a critique of Holocaust decorum in Germany and encourage the reconfiguration of the terrain of social interaction between the gentile majority and Jewish minority. Just as Biller’s provocative project allows for a critical and nuanced perspective of the German-Jewish relationship, these literary and filmic texts offer the transgressive potential to glimpse the censored dimension of “Jewish” discourses.<sup>22</sup> When tracing this repressed dimension in Levy, Brauner, and Biller, I come to the following conclusion: today’s writing and film about Jewishness work towards reinstalling that foreignness or otherness in German-Jewish identity – an otherness located in the collective’s self and without which “normality” is impossible.

In this sense then, Orientalized Jewishness is a touchstone for Jewish self-renewal decades after the Holocaust. It facilitates the re-positioning in a process Stuart Hall, in his essay *Cultural Diaspora and Identity* (CDI 394), theorizes in terms of the production of “cultural

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<sup>22</sup> I’m referencing Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “minor literature”, which uncovers the blind spots and repressions in the majority’s “major language” to say that the form of Jewish minority writing discussed here actually addresses those very blind spots and repressions in the minority’s “minor language” itself.

identities.” Arguing that identities are always generated in context and are therefore “subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power,” he describes the positioning of subjects within discursive structures to say that “identity is constituted, not outside but within representation” (Hall CDI 402), with literature (and cinema) a privileged site for discovering places of enunciation. By drawing attention to the realm of literary and filmic representation, Hall challenges us to take seriously the mechanisms authors employ in mediating cultural identity and notions of alterity. He reminds us that they “are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being” (Hall, QCI 4). Orientalisms are – for better or for worse – a part of our larger inventory of positioning tools and, following my observations, serve to reconstitute the plurality of Jewishness while breaking up fossilized structures of identification. Making possible an important intervention in the meaning-making process of Jewish self-identity, they belong to the Jewish minority as much as to the gentile majority. In fact, their use by the Jewish minority decenters Orientalism’s claims and ambitions, allowing us to look behind the façade of Orientalist knowledge and glimpse what it masks: the instability of the identity of all involved in its complicated economy. As uncanny or upsetting as this instability may seem, for my authors it opens a space of opportunity. The staging ground for their contestation of normative forms of self-understanding and reductive ascriptions, it promises the emancipation of the individual from confining structures within which he must operate, be it as member of a national, ethnic, or religious community.

With this study I wish to give insight into the stakes of appropriating the Orientalist aesthetic in past and present representations of the Jewish experience. A method of poetic practice then, I consider self-Orientalizing a form of representation with artistic and strategic

merit in the now. By mooring Jewish self-Orientalizing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary imagination and proving its role in the literary and cinematographic poetics of Jewish writers and directors today, I document its use as a technique for “writing” the Jewish narrative of emancipation. With this emancipatory objective in mind, the cultural producers discussed in my study perform the work of the postcolonial “theorist”, who suspends normative rules of representing cultural differences and who disrupts one-dimensional and reified notions of the Other. They establish, in this sense, a postcolonial gaze in the German artistic landscape that permits us to recognize the Other within us and turns difference into a necessary component of our own identifications.

## 2.0 WEST MEETS EAST: ORIENTALIST DISCOURSE AND 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY GERMAN-JEWISH WRITING

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

*I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism. . . . Accordingly my analyses employ close textual readings whose goal is to reveal the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work is a contribution. . . . Orientalism offers a marvelous instance of the interrelations between society, history, and textuality . . .*

*Edward Said (23-4)*

*Die Aufgabe einer wissenschaftlichen Beschreibung wird vielmehr darin bestehen, ihrerseits literarische Selbstbestimmungsdiskurse zum Gegenstand zu machen und zu fragen, mit welchen argumentativen Verfahren in den verschiedenen historischen Debatten, letztlich aber in jedem einzelnen Schreibakt, in jedem einzelnen Text, der irreduzibel vieldeutige interkulturelle Raum der deutsch-juedischen Literatur konstruiert und interpretiert wird.<sup>23</sup>*

*Andreas B. Kilcher (XV)*

*We must see the German Jews in the context of their time and, at the very best, appreciate their authenticity, the way they saw themselves and others, often with reason.*

*Amos Elon (12)*

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<sup>23</sup> “It will be the objective of any scholarly description to take the discourse of literary self-determination as its object and to ask which methods or argument are mobilized to construct and interpret the irreducibly ambiguous intercultural space of German-Jewish literature in the various historical debates, in each individual act of writing, and in each individual text.”

When in 1848 Leopold Kompert (1822 in Münchengrätz – 1886 in Vienna) published his breakout collection of tales *Aus dem Ghetto* (*From the Ghetto*) and Karl Emil Franzos (1848 in Galicia – 1904 in Berlin) wrote his last and most recognized work, the ghetto story *Der Pojaz*, in 1893 (published in 1905), Jews in the German-speaking lands had been experimenting with multiple forms of written discourse to articulate the Jewish voice in response to the events and debates of the time. Long concerned with advancing their legal, economic, and social status, they looked to modes of writing that would enable them to negotiate the pressure to modernize in the wake of the Enlightenment. Several historical moments and prominent figures accompanied the emergence of this literary voice that Kompert and Franzos exemplified in a distinctive genre and style of their own. My intention in this chapter is to probe into Kompert and Franzos' ghetto fiction in the context of Jewish emancipation as it evolved in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rather than in the context of its aesthetic merits or popularity. Instead of targeting the genre's literary caliber, I'm thus concerned with the particular method and mode by which Kompert and Franzos' ghetto stories engage notions of Jewish cultural difference so central to Jewish self-understanding. Before I turn to a discussion of their strategies, I wish to outline the contours of the German-Jewish literary discourse since the late 1700s and of key political events in order to situate Kompert and Franzos within this body of writing and their times.

In the 1770s, the intellectual investment of Jewish Enlightenment leader Moses Mendelssohn and German philosopher and dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in the question of Jewish emancipation stands as the cornerstone of the emancipatory struggles that define Jewish acculturation and assimilation during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, until the Nazis' rise to power in the 1930s rendered all such efforts futile. Their intellectual debates challenged Enlightenment

principles and brought into the open the issues of religious tolerance, the secularization of consciousness, and active Jewish participation in secular culture on behalf of the Jews. Doubtlessly, the Jewish challenge both sparked and answered developments in the political arena. Among the most influential policies regarding Jews at that time were the 1781 treatise *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*<sup>24</sup> from 1781, introduced by the Prussian civil servant Wilhelm von Dohm, and the *Toleranzpatent*<sup>25</sup> of 1782, issued by the emperor of Austria Joseph II. These decrees unleashed fierce disputes about how to integrate Enlightenment notions of universality and claims to Jewish particularity. For the “tolerated Jews,” as Paul Mendes-Flohr (55) explains, such emancipatory policies would change the terms of their existence: economically, they could grow; politically, the edicts promised eventual civil parity; culturally, they stimulated Jewish acculturation and religious reform. With change radiating from the metropolitan centers of Berlin and Vienna, Jews began to cast off the shackles of their ghetto existence, along with those distinguishing and visible markers of their allegedly “Oriental ways” in the German lands.<sup>26</sup>

Despite these early and hopeful advancements in favor of the Jewish populations spread out across the vast expanse of the German and Austrian territories in Central and Eastern Europe, the Congress of Vienna, at the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, set back efforts. The participating powers restructured Europe only to undermine the reforms won under the influence of the French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic rule in Europe, as Mendes-Flohr

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<sup>24</sup> “On the Civic Improvement of the Jews”

<sup>25</sup> “Patent of Tolerance”

<sup>26</sup> In the discussions surrounding Jewish modernization, Jews are often referred to in terms of the “Oriental” or as “the Jews of the Orient,” or are described as having “Oriental traditions.” Examples can be found in the anthology *The Jew in the Modern World*, by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz.

explains. Even worse, latent anti-Semitic sentiments culminated in the “Hep-Hep” riots of 1819<sup>27</sup> and dealt a serious blow to the prospect of legal emancipation for Jews. Yet many Jews in the German lands held on to the belief that their unconditional commitment to German culture would overcome the public’s resentments and facilitate their civic integration. In fact, Jews had by then adopted the German language for all domains of life, at the expense of Yiddish and Hebrew, and already by the 1830 were producing literature in German, publishing magazines, feuilleton, and newspapers.<sup>28</sup> Political writer, journalist, and editor Ludwig Börne (1786-1837), and poet, critic, and journalist Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) are perhaps the two most prolific figures epitomizing a new generation of German Jews for whom the activity of writing and of writing literature provided a venue to engage with developments in German culture and politics.<sup>29</sup> To be sure, other Jews before them had made attempts at literary forms of expression in the German language, and many more would build on these works to expand the register. In particular, the German language poems by Isachar Falkensohn-Behr from 1769 have been interpreted in terms of the entry of an Eastern Jew into the world of German literature and are followed by Salomon Maimon’s autobiographical account (1792) of his daring journey from East to West, from the Eastern shtetl to the Berlin of the late 1770s, and by Rahel Varnhagen’s extensive epistolary oeuvre of the 1790s through the 1830s. From the 1830s onwards, we can

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<sup>27</sup> The *Hep-Hep* riots of 1819 started in Bavaria, Würzburg, and spilled over into central and southwest Germany, even into pockets in the North of Germany as far as Hamburg. During the riot phase of several days, Jews were driven from their shops and homes and their belongings destroyed. Amos Elon, in *The Pity of it All* (102), addresses the rationale behind the attacks on Jews by noting that “the search for ‘rational’ reasons was widespread and, of course, useless.”

<sup>28</sup> The definition of “Jewish literature” is contested and can be answered in several ways. Following Jonathan Hess’ (8) definition of Jewish literature from the 1900s, it would “refer to a variety of types of writing” and find its very specific expression in Jewish “belles lettres.”

<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the writing of female author Fanny Lewald is indebted to the ideals of revolutionary France and of the Vormärz period in Germany.



observe an even more significant diversification and proliferation of German-Jewish prose fiction.

It should be noted that different Jewish perspectives worked with different interpretive frameworks and genres to envision distinct outcomes of the emancipatory struggles. As a result, literary representations of the German-Jewish experience throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century competed with each other in negotiating the past and present, the gentile and the Jewish culture, social realities and visions of the future.<sup>30</sup> The Jewish historical novel that developed in the 1830s and flourished through the end of the century “was directed at re-forming – and reforming – the concepts of Jews and Judaism from within” (Ben-Ari 147). Paralleling the project of German identity and nation-building through literature, this new kind of fiction drew on the idea of a national Jewish consciousness and shared Jewish traditions, and was aimed at preserving a distinctly Jewish identity in the face of rapid assimilation and the loss of the Jewish cultural heritage, according to Jonathan Skolnik (237). He (237) tells us that historical fiction provided “the Jewish minority with its own romanticized version of a medieval past.”<sup>31</sup> Working with a different thematic focus but with a similar goal, the German-Jewish romance fiction that appeared on the literary market in the 1850s and ‘60s made love and love relationships between Jews (as opposed to between Jews and non-Jews) its exclusive subject matter, as Jonathan Hess in his study *Middlebrow Literature and the Making of German-Jewish Identity* (2010) points out. He maintains that another category of Jewish literature, Orthodox fiction, which in its very

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<sup>30</sup> Jewish writing in German is characterized by its diversity, and comes in a variety of genres, from the expository writing of the Jewish Enlightenment thinkers to Rahel Varnhagen’s epistolary collections, to Boerne’s journalistic activities, to the fictions produced from the 1830s onward. *The Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture from 1096 – 1996* gives an in-depth overview on the topic.

<sup>31</sup> Skolnik (237) counts Auerbach, Philippon, and Lehmann among the most noteworthy writers of historical fiction.

contemporary orientation allowed Orthodox Jews to reconcile their Judaism with German gentile culture, thrived side by side. Rather than propagating Jewish particularity, the Jewish ghetto story,<sup>32</sup> as an extension of the historical novel, catered to the needs of a readership looking to emphasize Western Jewish compatibility with the modern world and thus to actually “eliminate any sign of the ‘Ghetto Jew,’” according to Nitsa Ben-Ari (147). Although German Jewish writers before and along with Kompert<sup>33</sup> made the ghetto the focus of an isolated or occasional story, Kompert is “regarded the founder of the ghetto story as a distinct genre,” per Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb (6). Thus, first Kompert and later Franzos, each writing from the perspective of the acculturated German Jew, defines the ghetto story as a uniquely Jewish-themed genre, with their descriptions of the Eastern shtetls and their inhabitants.<sup>34</sup> Each author, I argue, produces a nuanced take on the dueling impact of internal Jewish and external gentile pressures on traditional forms of Jewish life, Jewish emancipation and modernization being their overarching cause.

My study posits the adoption of Orientalisms in Kompert and Franzos’ ghetto stories and examines their function for German Jews and their emancipation efforts at the time. In my

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<sup>32</sup> Krobb and Ben-Ari list Aaron Bernstein, Leopold Kompert, Karl-Emil Franzos, and Jakob Kaufmann among the best known. Gabriele von Glasenapp’s and Hans Otto Horch’s *Ghettoliteratur* documents, in three volumes, the history of German-Jewish ghetto literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Among the roughly 100 ghetto writers listed, several stand out: Berthold Auerbach, Aaron Bernstein, Karl Emil Franzos, Salomon Kohn, Leopold Kompert, Eduard Kulke, Salomon Hermann Mosenthal, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Nathan Samuel, and Hermann Schiff.

<sup>33</sup> Heinrich Heine’s *Rabbi von Bacherach* (1824) is perhaps the first example; Jakob Kaufmann’s *Der böhmische Dorfjude* (1841) or Salomon Hermann Mosenthal’s *Tante Gertraud: Bilder aus dem jüdischen Familienleben*, written in the wake of Kompert’s publication, are further examples.

<sup>34</sup> Kompert and Franzos’ works fit the definition Anna-Dorothea Ludewig (122) proposes for the “klassische Ghettogeschichte” (classical ghetto story) with its focus on the Eastern shtetl setting and its features so typical of poetic realism.

discussion, I will address the effectiveness of a perspective that, on one hand, was meant to foster Jewish integration into the dominant culture and the modern world, and, on the other hand, also compromised those very efforts. In sketching the ambiguities of Kompert and Franzos' approach, I distinguish between the former's choice to draw on Orientalist discourse and the latter's to move even a step further and borrow from the colonialist imagination when pushing an emancipatory agenda. Despite their differences, either angle constitutes a self-Orientalizing activity and is intimately bound up with key political events in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany: the promising prelude to what turned into the failed liberal revolutions in Europe of 1848 – the publication year of Kompert's first story collection, and also the creation of the German Empire in 1871 – around the time Franzos launches his writing career. Kompert's take on the ghetto hits the literary market at a moment, when many Jews in Central Europe had migrated into the dominant culture, yet lacked the civic rights to be fully integrated. Not until shortly before the German states united under the German Empire in 1871, past the height of Kompert's career, did Jews receive citizenship. The success of Jewish political emancipation was soon overshadowed by the intensification and eventual escalation of the anti-Semitic rhetoric. Its tone shifted towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from a focus on Jewish religious and cultural difference to a focus on the perceived biological difference of Jews. Incidentally, Franzos writes *Der Pojaz* in this tense political climate. By the time his work is published posthumously in 1905, over a decade after completion, a new generation of Jewish writers – Jakob Wassermann, Arthur Schnitzler, and Theodor Herzl among them – is already concerned with a quite different approach to negotiating their Jewishness.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Many of Arthur Schnitzler's works are concerned with the topic of anti-Semitism and the so-called "Jewish question" more generally. Whereas Schnitzler remains uninterested in the

This chapter neither discusses all the possible literary adaptations of the ghetto that German-Jewish writers generated<sup>36</sup>, nor does it test each of these more or less obscure writers for Orientalisms in their works. Instead, it focuses on Kompert and Franzos, as they were already, during their lifetimes, prominent German-Jewish writers who had reached a wide readership and who placed the Orientalist aesthetic at the heart of their specific type of ghetto fiction. Representing for many peers an important perspective, their stories not only shaped Jewish self-perceptions, but also could influence perceptions of and attitudes toward Jews. My analysis recognizes that Orientalisms are a problematic tool, especially for the minority writer. Yet, I wish to demonstrate that once appropriated by the minority writer and when read through the lens of the minority, they challenge the very premise of Orientalist discourse, as in Kompert, and the self-understanding of Jews and gentile Germans, as in Franzos. This first chapter lays the groundwork for my discussion in subsequent chapters of Orientalisms in German-Jewish literary and filmic narratives at the turn of the millennium more than 100 years later. It will allow me to draw parallels between the German-Jewish emancipatory agenda of the past and related efforts in the present.

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discourse of Jewish renewal, Theodor Herzl responds to the growing anti-Semitism with his revolutionary project of political and cultural Zionism. By contrast, Jakob Wassermann thematizes the double bind that characterizes his German and Jewish identity and informs his concept of justice. He refuses the idea of political Zionism for German Jewry.

<sup>36</sup> Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb, in the edited volume of *Ghetto Writing. Traditional and Eastern Jewry in German-Jewish Literature from Heine to Hilsenrath*, describe different types of ghetto writing: ghetto fiction, diaries, travelogues, and autobiographies.

## 2.2 LEOPOLD KOMPERT'S "JUDENGASSE"

### 2.2.1 Reinventing the Eastern Ghetto

Different from the fictional prose or the expository writing of his peers, where Germany and Austria serve as the experiential context for the Jewish protagonists, Leopold Kompert's (1822-1886) oeuvre features the traditional Eastern Jewish ghetto as the setting of his stories. This thematic move into the minoritarian space may come as a surprise, considering the generally negative image of the ghetto in the minds of many Western Jews and certainly of non-Jews. Kompert himself belonged to the acculturated Austrian-Jewish community who typically had neither patience for, nor firsthand knowledge of, the alleged backwardness of the ghetto. But, he manages to articulate this unusual world of its own in a new idiom that speaks meaningfully to a Jewish and non-Jewish readership. Jonathan Hess (ML 103), along these lines, suggests that readers used Kompert's "universal appeal [...] to legitimate the cultivation of Jewish identity for acculturating and acculturated Jews." My discussion illustrates the importance of the Orientalist aesthetic in achieving this kind of appeal and how it provides the set of tools to transform the ghetto. Despite the fictional ghetto's redeeming qualities, however, Kompert's stories also restrict the identificatory possibilities for his peers. Due to the limitations of the Orientalist aesthetic, the traditional Jewish lifestyle remains incompatible with being German and must be banished to the past.

Born in Münchengraetz (part of the Austrian Empire) to a merchant father and the daughter of a rabbi, Kompert enjoyed the privileges of a German education, first at the *Gymnasium* in Jungbunzlau (Bohemia) and later on in Prague, followed by studies in medicine at Prague University. Due to his father's unexpected business bankruptcy, he was compelled to

abandon his academic pursuits and make a living for himself as a private tutor between 1843-47 – the years when his prolific writing career began. The publication of his first collection of tales, *Aus dem Ghetto*,<sup>37</sup> in 1848 – more stories of the same genre appeared in 1860 and 1865 – earned him widespread attention and opened up a career track as editor for several magazines in the Viennese capital. With these early stories, he established and defined the genre of Jewish ghetto literature – a genre said to be indebted to German-Jewish writer Berthold Auerbach's popular *Dorfgeschichten*<sup>38</sup> from the Black Forest region, originally published in 1843 and concerned with depictions of village life in a predominantly Catholic environment. By contrast, Kompert's subject matter is its Jewish equivalent of everyday life in the shtetl communities of the Austrian Empire, from which he creates a rich tapestry of colorful vignettes describing regional Jewish traditions, customs, figures and scenarios. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and the time of the publication of *Aus dem Ghetto*, the traditional Jewish shtetls in Bohemia and Moravia had already lost much of their population base. Jewish assimilation into Austrian-German culture and the increasing geographic mobility of the younger generation of Jews had drained the communities, whereas the traditional living space of Jews in Galicia, the Easternmost region of the Austrian Empire, remained a reality and largely intact at the time.<sup>39</sup>

The disintegration of the shtetls in Bohemia and Moravia followed the liberal reforms in the late 1700s under emperor Joseph II and an increasing willingness on behalf of Jews to leave the world of the shtetl. Kompert himself exemplifies a generation of Jews having made the transition into the gentile world and eager to continue the path towards full legal rights. His

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<sup>37</sup> *From the Ghetto*

<sup>38</sup> *Village Tales*

<sup>39</sup> Leon Weliczker Wells, in his autobiographic documentary *Shattered Faith*, offers a detailed description of shtetl life in Galicia as it still existed through the early 20<sup>th</sup> ct.

writing, as for many other Jews, became a means to find his way in a world in constant flux. Unlike Heine or Börne, Kompert stayed away from radical political commentary, satire, and irony. His experience in the role of editor in Vienna had most likely warned him of the risks of any political engagement through writing. The editor Kompert would have been well aware of the conservative regime's tight, censoring grip on publications of any sort during the tumultuous *Vormärz* period that spans the decades between 1815 and the liberal revolutions of 1848. The threat of censorship may have guided his stylistic approach and thematic focus so different from Heine and Börne. His subject matter – the dwindling ghettos of the Eastern Empire – certainly granted him artistic license to imagine and reconstruct what had ceased to be part of lived reality for many of his Western peers.<sup>40</sup>

On the whole, Kompert's literary project was favorably received by his contemporaries and accordingly reviewed. He's credited with producing a platform for acculturated Jews from where to reconcile their Jewish and thus subaltern ghetto origins with their aspirations to being modern German / Austrian Jews. Poignantly, Florian Krobb (Metzler 329) emphasizes that "mit seiner Erschliessung des Lebensreiches, den er Ghetto nennt, für die deutschsprachige Literatur, stellte Kompert den Juden im deutschsprachigen Mitteleuropa einen eigenen literarischen Identifikationsraum zur Verfügung."<sup>41</sup> He echoes Hess' verdict when he further states that Kompert makes "an attempt to fill the adopted literary and cultural form with appropriate Jewish content. Or, in simple terms, to write German literature with Jewish subjects" (Krobb 52). Kompert's peer reviewers judged his work in similarly favorable terms.

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<sup>40</sup> *Aus dem Ghetto* was originally published in 1848 by Grunow in Leipzig, Germany, outside of Austria.

<sup>41</sup> "with his exploration of a living space, which he calls 'ghetto,' for German literature, Kompert made available to the Jews of Central Europe their own literary space"

In his review from 1848, Ludwig Philippson (Glasenapp 546), the renowned Jewish rabbi, writer, and publisher, comments on the discrepancies between Western and Eastern Jewry's way of life as described in Kompert and acknowledges that "Kompert's Geschichten [auch] aus Böhmen und Ungarns Ghettis stammen, von denen die deutschen Gemeinden sich sehr unterscheiden und noch mehr jetzt unterscheiden,"<sup>42</sup> only to regret "dass wir unseren Lesern nicht früher von diesen herrlichen 'Geschichten aus dem Ghetto' Kunde gaben."<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Emil Lehmann (Glasenapp 549), one of the budding champions of the religious reform movement in Germany in 1848, praises Kompert for having "das Ghetto in die Poesie eingeführt, in einem Werke, das dem Besten, was die deutsche Literatur der Neuzeit geliefert, beizuzählen ist."<sup>44</sup>

Both Philippson and Lehmann, in 1848, and also Krobb and Hess more than 150 years later seem to recognize Kompert for breaking with a pattern of representing traditional Jewishness. The former appreciate the romantic and compassionate lens through which Kompert paints an almost ideal space of communal life, the latter the tales' potential for the self-understanding of the Jews of Central Europe during the mid-century decades. They credit him for his generous depictions of a lifestyle that had been impossible to narrate in neutral or positive terms. In locating his "chose du texte" right at the centers of Jewish social and cultural isolation and in transforming the foreign ghetto into a familiar space on par with the idyllic Black Forest communities featured in Auerbach's *Dorfgeschichten*, Kompert tackles a discourse

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<sup>42</sup> "Kompert's stories come from the Bohemian and Hungarian ghettos from which the German communities are quite different and are even more different today"

<sup>43</sup> "that we did not draw our readers' attention to these wonderful stories from the ghetto any earlier."

<sup>44</sup> "introduced the ghetto into poetry, ranking among the best works German modern literature has produced."



of Jewish inferiority and backwardness. A long history of open and latent bias against Jews premised on their cultural and religious difference had turned the ghetto Jew into the unmatched antitheses of Christians and the ghetto itself into the epitome of disorderliness, respectively. The negative image had even survived the Enlightenment debates of the late 1700s, when presumably rational thinking had corrected outdated values and paved the way for religious and cultural tolerance.<sup>45</sup> Even if in the German lands, the ghettos and thus the paradigmatic ghetto Jew had disappeared by the mid-1800s from the demographic map as an immediate and real presence, the stigma of the ghetto had not vanished.<sup>46</sup> In fact, the stereotype of the Oriental ghetto Jew was readily available to complement the anti-Semitic vocabulary of the growing German nationalist movements during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With their emphasis on Jewish “Oriental” ways and “Oriental traditions,”<sup>47</sup> politicians, scholars, and clergy sought to prove the presumed otherness of Jews and thus paint Jewishness in contradistinction to Germanness. Much of the rationale behind their argument can be traced, I contend, to a particularly problematic form of knowing the world. Edward Said in *Orientalism* argues that the West, over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, constructed an authoritative and hegemonic system of polarized “ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (42). While discursively constructed and maintained, this distinction is, according to Said, taken for true and natural. He outlines the processes that funneled and continue to funnel the West’s

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<sup>45</sup> A prime example is *On the Physical and Moral Constitution of Today’s Jews: The Voice of a Cosmopolite* (1791 and 1803), authored by Karl Wilhelm Grattenauer, a Prussian jurist answering the Enlightenment debates with attacks on Jewish character and presumed ethnic, religious and racial inferiority.

<sup>46</sup> The Frankfurt ghetto, for example, still known to Goethe, Boerne, and Heine, and the object of their musings a few years prior, had already disappeared.

<sup>47</sup> Compare the examples from the anthology *The Jew in the Modern World*, by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz.

pursuit of making “an ontological and epistemological distinction . . . between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (Said, 2). For Said, most scholarship and also literature, but particularly the field of Oriental scholarship that emerged in the 1700s, contributed to “Orientalizing the Orient” (49). While his argument favors French and English examples – a move for which he has been criticized and which unduly brackets the Orientalizing practices and experience of other groups – he quotes from a number of German philosophers and poets (Michaelis, Herder, Schlegel, Humboldt, and Goethe) to stress the network of fields and thinkers involved in the production of knowledge he calls Orientalism.

Admittedly, Said’s critique targeted the Orient at large - Asia, India, and the East - and not the Jews of Europe. Others since have expanded his theory to take into account the German cultural sphere. For example, Todd Kontje (12), in *German Orientalisms* (2004), points out: “because Orientalism has more to do with Western ideology than Eastern geography, the actual location of ‘the Orient’ matters less than the consistency of a certain Orientalizing discourse.” He privileges the “symbolic geography” of Orientalist attitudes, rather than actual geographic locations. For Kontje (12), Orientalisms in German culture – “German Orientalisms” – are “an ideological construct,” which he identifies in works of German literature from across several centuries. He includes writing produced in the German lands from the early modern period through the present and thus sketches the contours of a long history of Orientalizing the East. He locates the Orient in Eastern Europe and even Eastern Germany rather than, let’s say, in India, the Islamic Orient, or China, as in Said.<sup>48</sup> Kontje’s apt reworking of Said, my study

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<sup>48</sup> Kontje analyzes, for example, Goethe’s *West-östlicher Divan* (1819), Gustav Freytag’s *Soll und Haben* (1887), and Günter Grass’ *Die Blechtrommel* (1959), *Unkenrufe* (1992), and *Im Krebsgang* (2002).

claims, should be further amended to inject the theoretical apparatus with the Orientalist knowledge German-Jewish writers, too, contributed to the discourse.

Appropriating the free-floating attributes ascribed to the “Orient” and the “Oriental” around 1800, Jewish writers often described themselves and fellow-Jews using the language of the Westerner. The master trope of the move from the dark East to the enlightened West and from wilderness to civilization found in Maimon, Behr, and Mendelssohn in the 18<sup>th</sup> century surfaced after the turn of the century in Zunz<sup>49</sup> and even in Heine. Heine, for example, originally voiced his contempt for the caftaned traditional Jews he encountered in Poland, who live in “pigsty-like holes . . . whine, pray, haggle, and are miserable . . . their spiritual world sunk in a morass of unedifying superstition” (Elon 121). Similarly, Rahel Varnhagen, in the early 1800s, laments the uncultured, uncultivated, and hapless features that make up Jewish backwardness, which – to use Hannah Arendt’s (4) summary of Varnhagen’s verdict – allow them to “grow up like the children of savage tribes” lacking the proper traits of mature human beings. Alternatively, the popular German-Jewish literary magazine called *Der Orient* (The Orient), from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and with a German-speaking target readership, capitalizes on the implicit pairing Orient / Jewish world to cater to its Jewish market.

Kompert must have understood well what he was writing against when choosing for his subject matter the ghetto and its inhabitants, but also the German tradition he wanted to emulate. Considering the hopes of German-Jews for full legal emancipation in the 1840s, Kompert needed to move beyond the stereotype and correct the negative image if he wanted to write about Jews. Thus, his fictional ghetto-Jews have little in common with the stereotype

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<sup>49</sup> Leopold Zunz, one of the founders of the *Society of Culture and Science of the Jews*, penned an *Outline of Matters in Need of Improvement among Jews* in 1819, listing the perceived ills and vices of the Jews that determine their assumedly inferior existence.

known in the 1800s: they are sympathetic characters whose lives he narrates in a conciliatory tone tinged with a dose of humor. Using the mechanisms of the Orientalist aesthetics, Kompert works towards the ghetto's redemption. His adaptation of Orientalisms challenges us to reconsider two of Said's (19) assumptions: first, that through the 1870s, "the German Orient was almost exclusively a scholarly, or at least a classical, Orient . . . but it was never actual"; and second, that the "Oriental" is denied the opportunity to represent himself on his own terms within Western culture.<sup>50</sup> Contrary to Said, Kompert tells us that a uniquely "German Orient" did exist in Central Europe and in the German lands, and that the ghetto Jew embodied the "Oriental." The Oriental Other could be the object of Orientalizing practices as much as he could be its agent and author.

### 2.2.2 The telescopic gaze of a Jewish Orientalist

Draussen vor dem Ghetto . . . . Ich aber sage: Lasst mich! Auf dem Berge muss ich stehen!

*(Outside of the ghetto ... But I say: Let me! I must stand on the mountain!)*

*(Kompert in Glasenapp 94)*

The programmatic foreword to *Aus dem Ghetto* in 1848 introduces the stories as a retrospective of a way of life belonging to the author's grandparent generation and his own childhood. Assuming the location of an observer, as someone who finds himself on the top of a mountain "draussen vor dem Ghetto" (outside of the ghetto; Glasenapp, 94) and who looks down on his family's place of origin, the "Judengasse" (ghetto), Kompert metaphorically illustrates his distanced yet expert perspective. The framing of this original collection is complemented by the

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<sup>50</sup> Said (40) points out that in Orientalist discourse, the Oriental is made the object of study, of disciplines, of illustrations, and depictions, but never the acting subject.

foreword to the second edition from 1850, which includes a reviewer's summary of Kompert's project as "der scheidenden Zeit noch einmal in das liebe trauliche Gesicht zu sehen, ihre Züge fest zu halten, ehe sie ihm unkenntlich werden"<sup>51</sup> (Glasenapp 95). Despite the acknowledgement, in the foreword to the same edition, of hardships suffered by the ghetto dwellers – "wenn er also den alten Titel wählt, so geschieht dies aus jenem Gefühle, das uns nicht nur die Orte aussuchen heisst, wo wir früher glücklich waren, sondern auch jene, wo wir so viel gelitten hatten!"<sup>52</sup> (Glasenapp 95) – Kompert's stories stand out for their positive and affirming, albeit somewhat sentimental, representation of ghetto life that contrast starkly with the ghetto's reputation in the German lands.

From the onset, this author spells out his approach for his readership, setting expectations and providing the proper guidelines to understanding the stories. Without a doubt, he seeks to survey a place and its people at risk of being wiped from the consciousness of assimilating German and Austrian Jewry. From his present cultural location in the mid 1800s, as Jonathan Hess (ML 78) has suggested, Kompert writes to recreate and preserve memories of a time and place, where Jews lived in intact and harmonious communities of their own while coping with the encroaching challenges and transformative forces of the industrial age and of modernization. In thematizing the wholesome community lifestyle of traditional Eastern Jewry, he wants to document a world located in the margins of modern Western civilization and overlooked as a respectable equal to its gentile counterpart – a location his version of the ghetto seems to correct. Understood this way, one may recognize the postcolonial features and the

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<sup>51</sup> "to take one last, loving look at the face of a parting time, to remember its features before they become unrecognizable."

<sup>52</sup> "his choice to use the old title is borne from the desire to not only include those places where we enjoyed happiness, but also those where we experienced so much suffering"

“subversive dimension” Florian Krobb (GW 53), in his discussion of Kompert, reads into the stories. However, Kompert’s explicit championship of Jewish ghetto life is complicated by his implicit authoritarian gesture of speaking *for* and *of* those whose way of life and experiences have not been adequately recorded in history and literature. By issuing his corrective perspective of ghetto life, I argue, Kompert engages in Orientalizing practices that undercut what he set out to achieve.

For one, the question of representation takes center stage in Orientalism. According to Said (21), visible evidence distinguishes the “Orientalist text,” both the “so-called truthful text . . . [and] the avowedly artistic text,” and can be found in “style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, [and] not [in] the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original” (Said 21). Kompert’s stories of the “Judengasse” are no exception to Said’s call for scrutiny. In the foreword, for example, Kompert’s self-positioning as a writer provides evidence of a narrative device deemed one of the hallmarks of Orientalist discourse theory. When he describes his grandparents in the ghetto, whom he watches from atop the mountain while commenting that “unten auf dem Hausgange stand die liebe, traute Grossmutter in ihrer verblichenen goldenen Haube, und der herrliche Grossvater,”<sup>53</sup> Kompert affirms his personal affiliation and kinship with the anonymous group of Jews with ghetto roots. He fashions himself in the role of an intermediary who is familiar with both traditional and modern Jewry and possesses an intimate understanding of either world. While this gesture certainly lends his voice authority and authenticity, the experience he creates for his readership is one of distanced observation from the privileged position of

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<sup>53</sup> “there, at the door step, stood my dear, familiar grandmother in her faded, golden bonnet, along with my magnificent grandfather . . .”

someone looking in from the outside and removed from the scene. Projecting a telescopic gaze, the author zooms in on an unfamiliar and foreign culture and translates his objects' experience into familiar tales with claims to correctness. For Said, this particular gaze is that of the classic Orientalist whose subject is "the East made known" (Said 60) and who, in the process, "makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else: he does so for himself, for the sake of his culture, in some cases for what he believes is the sake of the Oriental" (Said 67).

Concerned with the socio-historical context of his work's inception and reception, Kompert commits to an agenda that would set the faulty record of Eastern ghetto life straight and explain its "true" workings to his mal-informed Western readership. Quite rightly, he considers the ghetto misunderstood and misrepresented in German culture. It is worthwhile quoting Kompert at length from the foreword to his *Geschichten einer Gasse* from 1865:

Ja! Ich wiederhole es, dem deutschen Volk sollen diese Geschichten erzählen, was diese 'Gasse' einst an Leid und Freud', an Drangsal und Aufrichtung umschloss; ihre Gestalten und Naturen, so treu wiedergegeben, als ich es vermochte, sollen darthun, unter welchen Kämpfen und Wehen das Licht des Morgens nach so langer Nacht fuer sie angebrochen ist; mit welchen Gefühlen, Anschauungen, Widersprüchen und Dissonanzen sie hart an der Schwelle stehen, die in das Thor der Gegenwart führt, einer Verjüngung entgegen, deren letztes Ergebnis noch nicht abzusehen ist.<sup>54</sup> (Glasenapp 99)

In addressing the German people and the "deutsche Vaterland" (German fatherland; Glasenapp, 99), his allegiances are clear, yet he speaks as a German Jew. The foreword invites an allegorical reading of the situation in 1848, where Jews stand at the threshold of a new era as

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<sup>54</sup> "Yes! I do repeat that these stories must tell the German people about the suffering and joys, the tribulations and uplift the ghetto walls contained; to represent their figures and characters as faithfully as I could and to show under which struggles and labor pains the light of the new morning after such long night has arisen for them; with which feelings, perspectives, contradictions and dissonance they stand at the threshold which leads to the gate of the present, of a rejuvenation, the scope of which we cannot yet guess."

citizens. From this threshold perspective, Kompert wants to communicate a truthful, credible account of ghetto life as it used to be, in narratives that register the experience of a stigmatized way of life, which, however, has been put behind and overcome. Accordingly, Florian Krobb issues these stories the label of “Vergangenheitsglorifizierung mit Gegenwartsrelevanz”<sup>55</sup> (M 330) to suggest that the stories relate to the present, even though the subject matter is taken from a time that no longer is. Yet, even if for this author and his readership the reality of shtetl life may be a thing of the past, it would be more fitting to say that Kompert’s gaze actively and deliberately turns the Eastern Jewish ghetto into history. Looked at this way, the issue at stake is not only one of authorial gaze, but also one of manipulating the memory of the ghetto. The act of relegating shtetl life to history, of locking away an important chapter of the Jewish modernization project with the intent to recover and refashion its memory through literature, is one of appropriation. Remembering that the traditional Eastern ghetto had actually not completely vanished at that time and that it still existed as lived reality in many ways, if not for the Jews of Germany, but then certainly for the fellow Jews at home further East, Kompert commits a serious political maneuver. With the stroke of a pen, he transforms the ghetto into a manageable, containable, and usable space he then can explain and render intelligible.

The lens through which Kompert focalizes his gaze belongs to one of the “typical encapsulations” Said (58) identifies in representing a “prodigious cultural repertoire [...]; settings, in some cases names only, half-imagined, half-known” (Said 63). For the majority of his readers, too, the ghetto is a little known space existing in the imagination alone and sharing features with the exotic and foreign places Suzanne Zantop (38) believes to have fascinated the minds of Germans in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. She argues that the travel literatures of the time

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<sup>55</sup> “glorification of the past with relevance for the present”



thrived on Germans' interest in unfamiliar locales – an interest she considers is “derived from their position as outsider looking in” and parallels Said's (40) notion of the West's “widespread interest in the alien and the unusual.” Kompert, I suggest, capitalizes on that same interest and the voyeurisms of his readership when making the ghetto visible and explaining it in order to unlock its secrets. Drawing from the emotionally charged language of the romantic period, he explains that “diese Volksseele ist so labyrinthisch angelegt, hat noch so viel Unentdecktes und Geheimnisvolles, dass ich noch am Anfang stehe, während ihr mich schon am Ende glaubt”<sup>56</sup> (Glasenapp 98). His rendering of the subject matter promises a time journey into a world full of mystery and ready to be discovered. Placing the ghetto in the “back then and there,” Kompert invites the reader to slip into the role of a time traveler from the “here and now.”

Importantly, the motif of journeying establishes the ghetto's geographic and temporal distance from the reader. As it turns out, its closed and self-contained world is not viable in the present. This non-viability is suggested when Kompert associates the ghetto with his own childhood. He watches himself in the “tollkühne Knabengestalt” (figure of a young daredevil; Glasenapp, 94), from the mountaintop nearby and now as an adult, thus from a seemingly elevated position and one of maturity. Here, Kompert cross-references the German discourse of “Bildung” and the notion of the individual's emotional and intellectual growth over the course of his formative years. Having “grown up” in transitioning to the gentile world beyond the ghetto walls, Kompert models a path from childhood to adulthood, from immaturity to maturity, and from a lower to a higher level of existence. While the implied non-viability of the ghetto does not invalidate the ghetto itself, it speaks to the ghetto's presumed developmental

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<sup>56</sup> “the people's soul is a maze-like construct, much of which remains so undiscovered and mysterious that I'm still at the beginning, while you deem me to have come to the end.”

immaturity. His solution to facilitating the maturation process means vacating that space by opening it up to German appropriation. Per Kompert's proposal, it's a cultural opening up articulated through the notion of modernization and encapsulated in the words of "Verjüngung" (rejuvenation) and "Schwelle . . . die in das Thor der Gegenwart führt"<sup>57</sup> (Glasenapp 99). His tone of empowering optimism highlights the benefits of extending the German cultural frontier to include what once was walled off.<sup>58</sup>

Writing for an audience removed from the source of his texts grants Kompert free range of play with factual and fictional knowledge. When interpreting ghetto life as a vestige from the past, he creates a temporal, spatial, and cultural divide between Eastern and Western Jewry. By consequence, the ghetto and traditional Jewishness are displaced and formatted in such way as to fit into the emerging narrative of progress and evolution at Kompert's time. Sebastian Conrad, in *German Colonialism: A Short History* (2012), posits the importance of this particular narrative for Orientalist projections in pre-colonial Germany.<sup>59</sup> Placing traditional Jewishness in a *historical* ghetto, Kompert actually marks the distance between traditional ghetto life and Western civilization. In fact, doing so only corroborates the ghetto's immaturity. By the mid-1800s', Kompert's gaze invokes the discourse of evolution and progress, which only gained traction with the colonial movement at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This Jewish author

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<sup>57</sup> "threshold . . . that leads to the gateway to the present"

<sup>58</sup> Kompert's proposed cultural annexation and move into the ghetto space seems to anticipate the project of "Ostkolonisation" (Eastern colonization) of the late 1800s, when Germans justified their interests in Poland with the promise of modernizing a backwards neighbor.

<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Conrad (20) points out in *German Colonialism: A Short History* (2012) that in pre-colonial Germany "the thrust of Orientalist projections was not only external," but it played out in the "antithesis between the 'Indo-Germanic' and 'Semitic' peoples" – an antithesis Kompert's perspective brings out.

participates, in his own way, in what Said describes with “Orientalizing the Orient” and engages in a practice perhaps more aptly described as “self-Orientalizing.”

To be true, Kompert’s work is more complex than a simple exercise in self-Orientalization. After all, he succeeds in circulating a positive image of Orientalized Jewishness and in developing a “literary voice acceptable to acculturated readers,” as Florian Krobb (GW 44) maintains. The distance he creates is in the interest of his gentile and acculturated Jewish readership, and Hess (ML 91) rightfully remarks on Kompert’s accomplishment in launching “an aestheticized vision of Jewish traditional life with claims to solid, middle-class respectability.” In this sense, Kompert lends credibility and visibility to the ghetto and works towards a critique of the existing Orientalist record. This idea resonates in Krobb’s (GW 42) discussion of Kompert when situating his oeuvre within the gradual process of decolonization that occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the “dissolution of the ghetto walls over many decades.” He credits Kompert’s ghetto fiction for its depictions of the life and traditional living space that “epitomized the colonial, suppressed situation of the minority group” (GW 45) through the language and conventions of the dominant culture. Krobb appears to detect a form of “writing back” – a term that defines the postcolonial project of the minority in responding in literary form to colonial and hegemonic versions of history. However, while in postcolonial theory “writing back” is understood to recuperate agency and a voice for the disenfranchised subaltern, Kompert, I argue, falls short of recovering that voice. Rather than welcoming traditional Jewishness into the contemporary Western world, Kompert chooses to historicize its lifestyle, keeping this other world at a safe and comfortable distance in that past. Here, the stories operate on two different levels: on one hand, they satisfy a Jewish readership interested in preserving the memory of the ghetto in a positive light. Yet, on the other hand, the ghetto’s relegation to

history invalidates its compatibility with being a modern Jew. The ambiguity of Kompert's message reveals the ambiguity of the author's own cultural location and a weakness in Said's argument. Orientalism constitutes an activity not reserved for the West or Westerner alone. Rather than depending on a geographically determined position in the West, the activity relies on one's cultural location and perspective and can be performed by anyone. This author, as I have illustrated, engages Orientalisms to realign the possibilities of being Jewish in Austria and Germany in 1848.

### **2.2.3 Kompert's German-Jewish Orient**

All of Kompert's stories carry similar features when merging bourgeois values with romantic notions of traditional ghetto life in the way Hess (ML 91) suggests. Reminding his acculturated Jewish readers of a common ghetto history, Kompert creates tales that encode the real-life experiences of their parent generation in plot and characters. Thus, we find traditional ghetto communities faced with the loss of their way of life under the influence of a parallel, modern, and non-Jewish universe that lies just behind the ghetto walls. Generally, the stories are concerned with the ordinary and commonplace of daily life in the ghettos of Moravia and Bohemia. Simple titles such as *Eiska's Brille* (Eiska's glasses), *Die Schwärmerin* (The dreamer), *Ohne Bewilligung* (Without Permit), or *Die Jahrzeit* (The Jahrzeit) encapsulate a focus on everyday events. Their presumed lack of complexity and sophistication when compared to canonical German literature of the time has earned Kompert's stories the reputation of "middlebrow literature" (Hess) – a category comparing unfavorably to the ideal of "highbrow literature," yet hinting at the popularity of this writing with the broader and quickly growing

reading public of the 1800s.<sup>60</sup> Among the examples available for consideration here, *Der Dorfgeher*, from his 1848 original collection, stands out as one of the most beloved and often-quoted tales that illustrates the workings of Kompert's ghetto fiction.

In *Der Dorfgeher*, we find the touching story of a family of five that has lost its oldest son at the young age of thirteen to the lure of life outside of the shtetl. This son, Emanuel, decides several years after his departure – he is, by now, an adult – and after receiving a secular education in the German lands, to return to his home and visit his family one more time before marrying his Christian fiancée, Clara. Upon this visit in the guise of a “Schnorrer” – a Jewish beggar and trader type hoping for a kindhearted host while traveling through town – Emanuel is invited to join the Shabbat table of his very own, charitable family. Without being recognized by his parents and siblings, he spends the weekly holiday with them and, to his surprise, finds himself absorbed in the still-familiar holiday routine and the simple joys that come with it. When it's time to move on and go back to his life on Clara's side, he's reluctant to say farewell and leave the comfort of his childhood home. He decides to accept the hosts' offer to stay for a while longer, and justifies his feelings in a letter to Clara: “Ich fühle, mein Bleiben in der Heimat hängt mit Fäden zusammen, die ich längst abgeschnitten glaubte, ich habe hier noch etwas zu verrichten, wovon ich mir keine Rechenschaft ablegen kann”<sup>61</sup> (Kompert 60). Explaining his emotional torment, he adds that “nicht einmal die Contouren meiner jetzigen Lage kann ich dir zeichnen; formlos, verwirrt, unendlich liegt Alles vor mir, ich sitze, wie jener Römer, auf Ruinen. . . . Wie bin ich zerstückt, ohne Einheit und Mittelpunkt, seitdem ich die

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<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Hess, in *Middlebrow Literature and the Making of German-Jewish Identity* (2010), observes a growing interest among German Jews in the mid-1800s in reading (serial) fiction more generally and Jewish-themed fiction in particular.

<sup>61</sup> “I feel that my stay in my homeland is held together by strings which I long thought I had cut. I still have business to do here, for which I cannot account.”

Heimat gesehen!”<sup>62</sup> (Kompert 74). Emanuel’s eventual change of heart and decision to renounce the future he had envisioned in favor of staying comes about when he accompanies his peddler father on the weekly tour around the countryside. During this trip, an intimacy between the two is created that recalls in Emanuel the kind of closeness only the intimate bond between parents and their children can facilitate. As Emanuel learns to appreciate his father for his wisdoms and courage as well as his integrity and uprightness, his eyes and heart are opened again to the salutary functions of Jewish traditions and the ethical behavior derived from the Jewish faith. Accordingly, he documents his feelings when he confides in Clara in yet another letter: “Ich bin wie ausgetauscht”<sup>63</sup> (Kompert 61). Transformed under the spell of the Shabbat ritual, Emanuel’s nostalgia for home takes over; he reasons that neither this ritual, nor the experience of being Jewish, could possibly be shared with Clara – an apprehension he formulates in the words “ob sie, die Anderserzogene, Andersglaubende mit denselben Augen sehen würde, ob ihre Seele durch die Pforten der Poesie, wie sie ihm Vater, Mutter und Heimath aufthaten, eintreten könnte. Er zweifelte, und der Zweifel führt ein zweischneidiges Messer”<sup>64</sup> (Kompert 77). Tormented by doubts about his future in the gentile environment and on Clara’s side, Emanuel eventually reaches the difficult decision to reveal his identity to his overjoyed family and stay home for good.

With scenarios like this one, Kompert introduces the ghetto into German literature, or, more precisely, he offers up his particular version of shtetl life that turns common stereotypes of

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<sup>62</sup> “not even the contours of my current situation can I outline for you; without shape, confused, unbounded is everything in front of me. I sit like the Roman of yonder, on ruins. . . . I’m so torn, without unity and anchor, since I’ve seen my homeland!”

<sup>63</sup> “I’m as if exchanged”

<sup>64</sup> “if she, the one brought up differently and of a different faith could see with the same eyes, if her soul could enter through the gate of the poetry opened up by his father, mother and his homeland. He had his doubts, and doubt is a two-edged sword”

the scheming and profiteering Jew or of the ghetto's filth and disorderliness upside down. Under his penmanship, the ghetto experiences its spectacular transformation from a space of disorderliness into one of admirable orderliness, populated by what seems like a new breed of ghetto Jews whose otherwise assumedly negative characteristics are tempered by bourgeois virtues and values: they are hardworking, honorable, respectful, striving, and innately good people. Equipped with these characteristics, the models provided here even appear to trump the exemplary qualities of the gentile German when Kompert describes the "gleichsam höheres, gleichsam geheiligtes biblisches Gemüth"<sup>65</sup> (Kompert 75) that seems to originate in their Jewishness. The father and mother figures are particularly good examples: traveling the countryside tirelessly during the week to peddle his wares and returning home only for the Shabbat holiday, Emanuel's father, a pious Jew, explains to the visitor the importance of being productive and driven, saying that "Jeder Mensch, und besonders ein Judenkind, muss etwas vorhaben, dem was er nachgeht"<sup>66</sup> (Kompert 69). He points out that Jewish children know their place in life when showing the proper respect for their parents, family, and community: "aber leider Gott! Bei den Christen ist es nicht so wie bei den Juden. Bei uns weiss das Kind, dass es Mutter und Vater nicht einmal vom Schlaf aufwecken darf"<sup>67</sup> (Kompert 81) and lauds his youngest son, Benjamin, for being just such "ein rechtschaffen Jüngel"<sup>68</sup> (Kompert 49).

Gender roles for men and women mimic the pattern of the bourgeois family. Whereas the father works outside of the home, the mother, Channe, is in charge of all domestic affairs and finds her purpose in the role of the mother and caretaker. Family life with only three

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<sup>65</sup> "equally higher, holy biblical spirit"

<sup>66</sup> "each person, and especially a Jewish child, must have goals in life she wants to pursue"

<sup>67</sup> "but, the Christians are different from us Jews. Here, each child knows that it is not allowed to even wake up father or mother from their sleep"

<sup>68</sup> "honest young man"

children is peaceful and neat, the home cozy, a base for meals together and family gatherings. The more typical chaos and unruliness found in depictions of the ghetto - as, for example, in Herrmann Schiff's<sup>69</sup> *Schief Levinche mit seiner Kalle*, from 1848, or even in Heinrich Heine's Frankfurt ghetto in *Der Rabbi von Bacherach*, from 1840 - are replaced by order and good behavior in Kompert. Accordingly, daily life's is informed by the conservative social codes so popular in the Austria and Germany of Kompert's generation, with the result that the aspirations and worries of Jewish parents are no different from those of their Christian counterparts. In the story, Emanuel's parents are looking to raise enough money in order to marry off their daughter, who must stay home until a Jewish husband can be found and the dowry paid, and they certainly want all of their children to do well while obeying the rules of their religion. Concerns over keeping the Jewish calendar in a gentile environment resemble related concerns among Christians protecting and justifying their own calendar. Thus, when Emanuel and his father, on their overland tour, discuss the Shabbat ritual and compare their weekly holiday to that of the Christian calendar, the peddler asks "wie könnt Ihr unseren heiligen Schabbes mit Sonntag vergleichen? und mein' ich denn, der Bauer soll keinen Tag haben, wo er sich ausruhen und auf der Ofenbank ausstrecken kann? Wer braucht nicht den Sonntag? Der Bauer und der Handwerker; und wer kann das besser einsehen, als der Jud'? Der Jud hat dafür seinen Schabbes"<sup>70</sup> (Kompert 72). Incorporating the idea of Sunday and Shabbes as the well-deserved resting days for Christians and Jews, respectively, Kompert establishes a basic likeness between

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<sup>69</sup> Hermann Schiff is the pen name for Isaak Bernays. His "komischer Roman" (comical novel) *Schief-Levinche mit seiner Kalle oder Polnische Wirtschaft* was first published in Hamburg.

<sup>70</sup> "how can you compare our Shabbat with Sunday? And, do I think that the peasant should not have his day of rest, where he can stretch out in front of the oven? Who does not need the Sunday? The peasant and the craftsman; and who other than a Jew can understand that best? That's why the Jew has his Shabbat holiday"



Jewish and non-Jewish values to emphasize that the two religions are perhaps not as different as interpreted elsewhere. The analogy makes an important point: it recalls the late 18<sup>th</sup> century discourse of religious tolerance, which puts to the test the principles of Jewish religion and values and their compatibility with German culture. It relates to an on-going inner-Jewish debate about the different possibilities to articulate and envision Jewish emancipation – a topic that had gained momentum since Mendelssohn and found traction among the Jews in Germany in the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>71</sup> The discussion between father and son, representing two generations of Jews *and* two factions of Jewishness, exemplifies this topical and philosophical discourse at the level of the common man. Moreover, the figures of father and son become metaphors for the conflict among the various members of the “family of Jews.” Their familial bond and argument in their roles as representatives of traditional *and* acculturated Jewry illustrate the ongoing frictions among Jews at the time. The inner-Jewish conflict over Jewish modernization was particularly noticeable in Germany, where the budding reform movements in the wake of the Jewish Haskalah (Enlightenment) culminated in the dispersion of Jewry into several different ideological directions. In the text, the issue is condensed in the threat of impending change to Jewish ways of life, as when the peddler father asks whether “Ihr meint, Gast, ich weiss nicht, was in der Welt vorgeht? dass man umgeht, den Schabbes abzuschaffen” (Kompert 73).<sup>72</sup> The discussion between father and son on their joint travels in gentile surroundings quite fittingly describes Jewry’s journey in search of Jewish identity within the non-Jewish dominant culture.

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<sup>71</sup> Paul Mendes-Flohr (155), in *The Jew in the Modern World*, discusses “emerging patterns of religious adjustment” during the 1800s, distinguishing between reform, orthodox, neo-orthodox, and ultra-orthodox movements.

<sup>72</sup> “You mean, my guest, I don’t know what happens in the world and that one is about to do away with the Shabbat holiday?”

Kompert's understanding of what this Jewish identity should look like is, however, not quite obvious. Kompert creates *Jews* in the image of the German Biedermeyer and invents a palatable ghetto past, or - to stretch his project even further, using Salman Rushdie's words from his essay on the migrant condition of today – invents for his estranged Western Jews an “imaginary homeland.” Along those lines, Hess (ML 83) describes Kompert's work as “giving significance to Jews' feelings of displacement” by granting them “a symbolic reunion with the lost world of their childhood.” Understood this way, Kompert's reconstructed ghetto space functions as an imaginary homeland that features the same “profound, originary depth” that Kontje (122) reads into representations of the Orient found in Goethe. In merging the imagined wholeness and depth of traditional Jewish life with the Western ideal of bourgeois respectability, Kompert creates the synthesis of two lifestyles hitherto deemed irreconcilable in a hybrid constellation. He thus generates what I consider a new and modernized, if not sanitized, Jewish Orient, resulting in a transmuted Jewish Oriental ghetto: the conversion from a negative into a positive and from a lesser to a higher level of existence. Whereas in Said and Goethe the “good” Orient is located in the distant past and in far away India, Kompert recuperates this very notion of the Orient in the spirituality of his morally upright Oriental Jews, pinpointing its location in Central and Eastern Europe.

By appropriating notions of the “good” Orient and the German bourgeois type, Kompert produces a form of counter knowledge for his purpose of creating a respectable Jewish type in a sanitized ghetto. Consequently, his ghetto and characters belie the negative stereotype, and Kompert actually defies Orientalism's “political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (Said 42). When he blurs the binary us / them, he reframes Western knowledge of the

Eastern ghetto and produces a corrective of the fixed category of Oriental Jewishness. In fact, the striking similarities between the ghetto Jew and gentile German – the peddler’s self-confidence mirroring the assertive, if not self-righteous, mindset of the bourgeois citizen – as well as between the Jewish and gentile world would suggest the possibility of easy transfers from one world to the other.

Yet, the text actually gives a less generous solution. *Der Dorfgeher* shows a community of Jews failing the attempt to erase their difference. When mimicking bourgeois society, Kompert creates a resemblance only, one that leaves recognizable the Oriental Jew inside. Relying on quintessential Jewish types for his characters – the “mendel” father, the ideal Jewish mother, the rabbi cousin and uncle – Kompert demonstrates their belonging to a distinctly Jewish world, one that functions according to its own rhythm and laws, with the weekly Shabbat ritual the anchoring moment in the story. Most characters exemplify the ghetto’s order. Emanuel’s mother Channe is characterized by her “stummen, lebhaftem Gebärdenspiel, wie es nur dem Ghetto eigen ist”<sup>73</sup> (Kompert 53), whereas Emanuel’s sister Rösele is the image of an Oriental beauty, with her long, black hair and sensuous features. Similarly, the physical ghetto space brings to mind the mysteriousness of an Oriental medina, when Emanuel and Benjamin must follow “alle Windungen und Krümmungen der Gasse, ja sogar durch das finstere Durchhaus, das man ohne Wegweiser nicht finden konnte”<sup>74</sup> (Kompert 46). In this sense, the ghetto epitomizes the implied breeding ground for the various Jewish types.

The answer to such clashing readings of Kompert’s stories may be found in the stories’ reception. The reviews by two contemporaries support the argument that Kompert’s sanitized

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<sup>73</sup> “silent, animated gestures so particular to the ghetto”

<sup>74</sup> “all the turns and meandering of the ghetto streets, even through the dark Through House, which one couldn’t find without signs”

Orient produces an ambivalent picture with an ambivalent message. For instance, rabbi Zacharias Frankel comments on Kompert's "schauerliches Phantasiegemälde"<sup>75</sup> (Glasenapp 544), apparently calling the author to task for his unreliability, suggesting that "das Bild ist ihm fremd . . . Kompert [beschreibt] als Jude, der mit Vornehmheit auf das von ihm verlassene Judenviertel zurücksieht und sich zuweilen zu jüdischen Zuständen herablässt, und daher sein Bild, das ihm selbst fremd geworden ist, durch Flitterwerk und jüdische Stichwörter auszustaffiren betreibt ist"<sup>76</sup> (Glasenapp 544). Frankel claims not to recognize the supposedly 'real' ghetto in Kompert's stories, faulting the author for being alienated from his subject matter and for creating a false and artificial image. If from Frankel's conservative Jewish perspective Kompert's stories are removed from reality and misrepresent Jewish ghetto life, German-Austrian critic Otto von Leixner finds Kompert's Eastern Jews inferior, outlandish, and incomprehensible: "wir stehen trotz aller Achtung, die uns das liebenswürdige und echte Talent Komperts einflösst, seinem Buche wie einem nur halb gelösten Räthsel gegenüber. Die Menschen sind interessant, aber die Motive ihres Handelns sind uns halb unverständlich, die dunklen Regungen ihres Gemüthes, denen die Motive entspringen, sind mit einem Schleier bedeckt . . ."<sup>77</sup> (Glasenapp 580). Kompert's cultural location of an acculturated Jew seems to prevent him from making accessible the "true" spirit of the ghetto. As it turns out, its assumed

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<sup>75</sup> "horrible painting of the imagination"

<sup>76</sup> "he's become estranged from the image ... As a Jew, Kompert looks back at the ghetto he left behind from a perspective of sovereignty and at times allows himself to immerse himself in the Jewish way of life, but the image has become foreign to him and he must embellish it with artificial patchwork and Jewish jargon."

<sup>77</sup> "despite the respect Kompert's dear and real talent imposes, we face his book much like we face a semi-solved riddle. The people are interesting, but the motifs of their actions are half incomprehensible for us, the dark motivations of their spirits that produce such motifs, are veiled . . ."

authenticity hinges on the stereotypical image of the Oriental Jew. In his Jewish-bourgeois incarnation, the ghetto is unacceptable to both traditional Jewry and gentile Germans.

Kompert's failure to create an authentic *and* modernized ghetto leads us to question the adoption of the structures of representation from the dominant culture for his project. If for Said, the work of the Orientalist means gaining control of the foreign to fix it as other, Kompert's domestication of the strange and foreign ends up distorting the distinctions between the two categories. In the process, he gives new meaning not only to Jewish identity, but also to non-Jewish German identity. Kompert ends up challenging our understanding of what the bourgeois German citizen *and* the traditional Jew should look like. This problem lies at the heart of the story and informs the plot's motivation: unable to recognize their own son in the undercover visitor from behind the ghetto walls, the parents actually fail to imagine the acculturated or assimilated Jew of the future. Their inability underscores a fundamental difference between traditional/modern Jewry and between Jew/gentile. Paradoxically, the fact that a traditional Jew (Emanuel) can credibly assume the identity of a fully assimilated Jew and pass as such shows the instability of distinctions thought to be fixed and natural. This unsettling of identities is theorized in Homi Bhabha's system in terms of the reinterpretation of the fetishized superior culture through repetition with difference. While for Bhabha the issue at hand is the challenge to the dominant culture by the minority,<sup>78</sup> in Kompert's work we find a dual challenge: in reintroducing the play of difference, Kompert renders his version of the ghetto into an uncanny experience for factions of the dominant and the minority cultures. After all, his Jews seem strange and unnatural in both their traditional and their assimilated

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<sup>78</sup> Homi Bhabha discusses how the colonizer, i.e. his assumedly superior culture, is mocked and challenged by the mimicry of the colonized, and experiences the destabilization of ideologies of superiority.

incarnation. Accordingly, Otto von Leixner in his review from 1876 (Glasenanapp 579-80) comments: “die Ghetto-Novellen des Letztgenannten haben ihrer Zeit verdientes Aufsehen erregt, wenn sie auch verständlicher für den Osten als für den Westen Europas waren,”<sup>79</sup> explaining further that “je weiter östlich man kommt, desto mehr treten die Stammeseigentümlichkeiten hervor, desto energischer ist die Abschiedung des Juden von dem Bewohner des Landes.”<sup>80</sup> Denying the ghetto Jew the opportunity to be anything but the stereotype, Leixner and also Frankel seem to insist that the ghetto must remain a world of its own to be legible.

In sum, the structures of representation – the Orientalizing gaze and the bourgeoisification of the ghetto – impose limits on the credibility of the picture and produce uneven readings. Kompert’s project is mired in the ambiguities of this author’s own cultural positioning between the West and the East. In fashioning the experiences of the ghetto Jew into a reformed and modern Jewish version of the Orient, Kompert produces his own Orientalisms from his point of observation “on top of the hill.” The readers encounter a Jewish Orient – one that elevates the Eastern ghetto by putting it on the imaginary map of the civilized world, yet one that is restricted to the past and incompatible with the present even though many of the shtetl communities in the East continued to thrive at the time. Thus, we find the notion of a still divided world rather than of a world unified by the similarities between Jews and non-Jews, as his sanitized Orient would suggest. Turning Emanuel’s dilemma into an either/or proposition and a choice between life in the ghetto and life behind the ghetto walls underscores the division.

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<sup>79</sup> “the ghetto stories of the latter have caused a stir at their time, even though they were much more comprehensible to the East than to the West of Europe”

<sup>80</sup> “the further East one travels, the more we see the tribal particularities, the more distinct is the difference between the Jew and the inhabitant of the land”

This division is tellingly amplified in biblical terms by the analogy with the return of the prodigal son in Emanuel's homecoming. His physical move home signals a spiritual return to Jewish values and ways, while at the same time Kompert makes the point that this way of life belongs to the annals of history.

## 2.3 KARL EMIL FRANZOS

### 2.3.1 A Jewish Missionary in the East

Das Nationalgefühl, das mich erfüllt, das auch ich mein Leben lang betätigt habe, ist mir von Kindheit auf eingeprägt worden. Ich war noch nicht drei Käse hoch, als mir mein Vater bereits sagte: "Du bist deiner Nationalität nach kein Pole, kein Ruthene, kein Jude – du bist ein Deutscher." Aber ebenso oft hat er mir schon damals gesagt: "Deinem Glauben nach bist du ein Jude." Mein Vater erzog mich wie mein Grossvater ihn erzogen, in denselben Anschauungen, sogar zu demselben Endzweck, ich sollte meine Heimat nicht in Galizien finden, sondern im Westen. Und auch die Gründe, die meinem Vater dazu bewogen, waren dieselben.<sup>81</sup> (Der Pojaz, 6)

The personal statement by Karl Emil Franzos, from the introduction to his masterpiece *Der Pojaz*, shows his sense of national identity and commitment to being German – a choice he made from among several options and as a result of his parents' path. Born in 1848 into a Jewish family in the town of Czortkow in Galicia, a border region wedged between what was then Russia, Poland, and the Austrian Empire, Franzos moved with his family to the cultural

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<sup>81</sup> The sense of patriotism I feel and which I practiced all life long was instilled in me from early childhood on. When I was merely a little boy, my father told me: "As to your nationality, you're neither Polish, nor Ruthenian, nor Jewish – you are German." But, just as often he told me back then: "As to your faith, you're a Jew." My father raised me the same way my grandfather had raised him and with the same views in mind and the same objective that I should not find my homeland in Galicia, but in the West. And my father's reasons were the same.

and regional capital of Czernowitz in the Bukovina when he was only a small child.<sup>82</sup> The vibrant energy of this modern city at the crossroads of different cultural and ethnic currents introduced Franzos to influences that were by no means limited to his Jewish heritage. Surrounded by Polish-, Yiddish-, Russian-, and German-speaking populations – languages he studied and spoke in addition to Hebrew – Franzos received his formal education in Czernowitz. The curriculum relied on the typical German “Gymnasium’s” focus on the humanities – not surprising since Amy Colin (VD 18) points out: “Czernowitz [in 1849] wurde ein Zentrum intensiven Handels-und Kulturaustausches zwischen den benachbarten Ländern. Es bot Schulen für die verschiedenen ethnischen Gruppen, Theater, Büchereien, Konzerthäuser.”<sup>83</sup> It was in this educational climate, which Colin (VD 21) holds responsible for shaping the dispositions of the regions’ Jewish writers, that Franzos developed his interest in Western literatures, languages and classical philology. He, like so many of his peers from the Bukovina, adopted what can be best described as a Germanophile’s stance on cultural values.<sup>84</sup> His eventual migration from Czernowitz in the Empire’s East, first to Graz and later to the capital of Vienna – the sites of his university studies and careers as journalist and newspaper editor – and from there on to the German capital of Berlin in the mid-1880s, further manifests his cultural and national orientation.

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<sup>82</sup> Amy Colin in *Versunkene Dichtung der Bukowina* (1994) and *Spuren eines Europaers: Karl Emil Franzos als Mittler zwischen den Kulturen* (2008) provides a cursory description of the region and its history.

<sup>83</sup> “Czernowitz [in 1948] became a center of commercial and cultural exchange between neighboring countries. It offered schools for the different ethnic groups, theaters, libraries, concert halls”

<sup>84</sup> Colin (VD 21) argues that “die multikulturelle Bukowina war mehr als ein literarischer Topos. Sie prägte das Denken, die Sprache, die Dichtungsauffassung ihrer Lyriker und Schriftsteller.” (“the multicultural Bukovina was more than a literary topos. It shaped the thinking, the language, the poetic vision of its lyricists and writers”).



Franzos' passion for German language and thought, however, did not translate into the desire to denounce his Jewishness. On the contrary, conversion, an often-practiced strategy to exit Jewry to become "fully" German and enjoy associated rights and privileges, was not part of his biographic agenda. Rather, his statement above suggests multiple, simultaneous attachments, and reveals two distinct sides to his identity: on one hand, his adoptive German nationality; on the other, his Jewish ethnic heritage and religious affiliation. This notion of twinning Jewishness and Germanness is one of the most noticed aspects of Franzos' identity and is evident in the descriptors scholars have assigned him: "zweigeist" (double spirit; Ansull 15), Franzos' "Dualismus" (dualism; Ludewig 14), "Ambivalenz" (ambivalence; Schwarz/Berman 389), or "Doppelwurzel" (double root; Ansull 11).<sup>85</sup> In emphasizing his own self-understanding as a modern *German Jew* in the Germany of the 1880s and '90s, Franzos, with his exemplary fusion of German nationality and secularized Judaism, seems to fulfill the aspirations of other Eastern Jews before him who had traveled West to join the modern world as Jews.<sup>86</sup> His migratory path from Czortkow to Berlin by the 1880s stands in this very tradition and is motivated by similar ambitions: for all of them, civilization in its specific German formulation was the route to a modern state of being, and German culture provided the content and template to get there.

However, this section argues that despite his own decision to follow the typical migration pattern from East to West, Franzos actually promotes an alternative path to escape the dangers of orthodoxy and of intellectual and cultural deprivation. Instead of being merely

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<sup>85</sup> Ansull (14) borrows the term "zweigeist" from Walter Benjamin, which refers to those Jewish intellectuals who wanted to be Jews and Germans at the same time.

<sup>86</sup> The line of examples includes luminaries like Moses Mendelssohn and Solomon Maimon among the earliest figures abandoning their native shtetl communities in favor of building new lives for themselves in the Enlightenment capital of Berlin.

another example of an Eastern Jew making the geographical and mental transition to the West, he reverses course when initiating the colonization of the East by proposing to inject the canon of Western values and civilizational ideals into the supposed wasteland of the Eastern periphery. Equipped with pen and pencil, Franzos sets out on a mission to facilitate the transformation of the traditional Jewish way of life via fictional tales of the Eastern shtetl communities, where notions of the ghetto's backwardness contrast sharply with the progressiveness of the West.

If literary fiction is his preferred tool, then the practice of self-Orientalizing is his preferred method of operation. Keeping Leopold Kompert's ghetto fiction from the mid-1800s and my discussion in mind, this practice is nothing new. Kompert had already positioned himself within Orientalist discourse and written in the idiom of the German using strategies of representation derived from what Said (70) calls an "Orientalist attitude." Kompert's Eastern ghetto – the traditional space of Jewish cultural difference – is transformed into a sanitized Orient and relic of the past from where its inhabitants have been able to migrate into German culture, if not always by making a physical move, at least by way of cultural assimilation.

What Kompert deemed a feasible and obvious route to advance the cause for Jewish emancipation, however, turns out to be a crossroads for Franzos just a few years later. Even if his writings seem to fit squarely within the Orientalist tradition outlined in Said, and are generally characterized by the Manichean worldview belonging to the classic Orientalist, they also incorporate features from the colonialist idea – an emergent discourse in imperial Germany during Franzos' lifetime.<sup>87</sup> Borrowing from this discourse, I maintain, Franzos makes the basic assumption that under German educational and cultural stewardship, Oriental Jewish

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<sup>87</sup> Sebastian Conrad, in *German Colonialism: A Short History* (2012), limits Germany's colonial project to the three decades following the formation of the German nation state in 1871 and sees it as "a significant and integral part of the period of high imperialism" (Conrad 1).

backwardness can be remedied and corrected. Thus, he no longer works within the parameters of the Orientalist gaze and its possibilities for Jewish emancipation in Kompert's sense, but rather of a gaze focalized through the lens of what postcolonial theory has termed "colonial difference," where the supposed civilizational inferiority of the other necessitates, if not mandates, Western intervention. Seen through this lens, the world is ordered "in developmental stages and concepts of temporality" (Conrad 156) and structured in binary oppositions. Franzos, in his collection of tales *Aus Halb-Asien: Kulturbilder aus Galizien, der Bukowina, Südrussland und Rumänien* (*Tales from Half-Asia*), from 1876, seems to espouse the notion of a world divided when he, for example, frames the Eastern shtetl communities as "Asian" and in contradistinction to the West. Importantly, in his later and last piece of writing – *Der Pojaz*, the object of my analysis – he experiments with the idea of German educational missionary work in the East.

My discussion of *Der Pojaz* takes as its point of departure Franzos' rhetorical and ideational affiliation with Orientalist and colonialist discourse. He adopts the idea of German cultural hegemony to adjust the perceived imbalance in developmental hierarchies between modern German and traditional Jewish lifestyles. While there are many aspects to the ideological premise of colonialist discourse, I focus on an examination of how Franzos' literary imagination is informed by – and in return informs – its cultural idea, rather than, to name just the most common, its military, political, or economic objectives. This focus requires me to assess how Franzos' self-Orientalism differs from Kompert's. The historical context in which each of these writers are embedded provides important clues and can help explain the differences in their take on a common concern for Jewish emancipation.

Unlike the time of Kompert's career in the mid-1880s when Germany was still struggling to become a nation-state, the time of Franzos' literary activity coincides with the era of high imperialism during the last quarter of the century. The change from a cluster of individual states into a nation-state with the installation of the empire in 1871 came with many consequences and left its trace in the way the nation was imagined, defined and realized. The change in rhetoric from Orientalist projections to colonialist projects during that time was an important part of the attempt at nation-building. If we accept Orientalism's argument, then Europe's nation states derived much of their identity from Orientalizing practices, with colonialist discourse further validating and inspiring national projects.<sup>88</sup> Testifying to Germany's new sense of self-confidence as a nation equal to Europe's other and already established great nation-states, the colonialist project introduced a new language of German civilizational superiority into public discourse, equipping Germans with the rhetorical resources to articulate their role on the global stage and in Europe vis-à-vis the Other.<sup>89</sup>

Without dismissing the discrepancies between the colonialist project overseas and related activities within Europe, we can, nevertheless, find striking parallels in vocabularies and ideas. If, for example, one of the key ideological foundations of imperial politics concerns itself with "the civilizing mission promising modernization to the colonized populations under the

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<sup>88</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel and Sebastian Conrad, in *Das Kaiserreich transnational: Deutschland in der Welt 1871-1914* (2004), argue that since 1871, "deutsche Geschichte wurde zur Sehnsuchts- und Erfüllungsgeschichte der nationalen Idee" (11), headlining their argument as "Geschichte des Kaiserreichs als Nationalgeschichte" (11) ("Imperial History as National History").

<sup>89</sup> Conrad (150) describes the underprivileged groups in Germany as "the objects of social education projects" geared at "elevat[ing] and integrat[ing] them into society." He argues that there is linguistic overlap between the language used to address the colonial other and the language employed to describe "the unemployed, 'vagabonds,' tramps and the 'work-shy' at home."

tutelage of the colonizers,” according to Conrad (3), and as is exemplified in the German Christian missionary project in Africa since the 1870s, then Otto von Bismarck’s “Kulturkampf” (cultural struggle) during his tenure as German chancellor outlines similar designs vis-à-vis Poland in the desired “Germanification” of the underdeveloped Polish territories.<sup>90</sup> In less political yet no less conspicuous terms, German literature, too, contributed to this discourse of backwardness and deprivation, both with regards to the natives of Africa and the “savages” in Poland and Europe’s Eastern frontier.<sup>91</sup> Referencing the East and Poland, one of the most quoted and much-read period novels, is Gustav Freytag’s *Soll und Haben* (*Debit and Credit*) from 1855, a *Bildungsroman* set in the German-Polish border zone. It features the rise of the orphaned Anton Wohlfahrt from accountant apprentice in a reputed German mercantile trading company to trusted council spearheading the business ventures in neighboring Poland. German middle-class virtues of diligence and discipline and German civilizational superiority are shown to prevail over Polish messiness and general ineptitude. Kontje (207) posits, in his discussion of Freytag, that “in retrospect, the Nearest East of Poland becomes a testing ground for what is portrayed as a specifically German form of colonialism”; further, he notes that “*Soll und Haben* combines an idealized and slightly anachronistic portrait of the Germans at work with an anticipatory vision of their destiny as a nation of conquerors and colonizers” (Kontje 208). Similarly, the genre of the *Ostmarkenroman* (Novel of the Eastern Marshes) that thrived in Germany in the 1890s applied popular developmentalist tropes

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<sup>90</sup> Conrad identifies the idea of Germany’s ‘civilizing mission’ and its materialization in the ongoing missionary project in Africa as a critical factor in popularizing the colonial idea at home. Already in the 1860s research expeditions to the African continent yielded a new order of knowledge contrasting the backward peoples and tribes of the ‘dark’ continent with the modern Western societies.

<sup>91</sup> There is currently a surge in interest in the study of German colonialist literature about Africa. Of particular interest is the function of colonialist writing by German women.

from the colonial archive to German Poland, thus creating discursive ties between the “primitive” peoples overseas and Germany’s equally “primitive” neighbors in the East.<sup>92</sup>

Franzos’ writing is embedded in these ideological and political trends. I demonstrate that from his position as a modern German Jew, he draws from and adds to the archive to submit his vision for modernizing the ghettos of Galicia. His choice of language and imagery contains the seeds for a civilizing mission in the East and for assigning German Jews like him an important role. In my close reading of *Der Pojaz* that follows, I will first consider Franzos’ construction of the Eastern ghetto as a space of cultural inferiority and his preparation of the Oriental ghetto for its cultivation with Western knowledge. In this point, his project mirrors the rationale behind German designs to intervene in primitive societies. Second, my examination of Franzos’ self-Orientalization shows where he differs from such designs and offers the possibility to reframe the German civilizing ethos. Third, I will discuss the realization of Franzos’ project through the mechanisms of mimicry and theatrical performance. Rather than being a method of resistance, as Bhabha claims, mimicry in Franzos serves a different purpose. It allows for various Jewish self-positionings within the dominant cultural framework and introduces an anti-essentialist and anti-assimilationist perspective of German-Jewish identity.

### **2.3.2 Building a Case for a Civilizing Mission**

Franzos’ final piece, *Der Pojaz*, is written in the spirit of this particular German “colonialist attitude” when tethering the issue of Jewish emancipation to the discourse of development and

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<sup>92</sup> Kristin Kopp, in *Germany’s Wild East* (2012), examines the motif of “inner colonization” in these works and discursive aspects of the Germanization of Poland through the use of the language of the colonial encounter.

“elevation.” Although the book was already completed in 1893, it was not published until after the author’s death in 1905, during the heyday of the German colonial movement. *Der Pojaz* tells the story of the young Chassidic-Jewish boy Sender Glatteis, from a Galician shtetl called Barnow, whose curious mind is inspired to imagine an escape from the confines of Orthodoxy after he secretly, and against all rules, watches the performance of one of Friedrich Schiller’s plays by a troupe of itinerant actors in a neighboring town. As Sender decides to pursue an acting career himself in order to stage and live his dream of becoming “ein Deutsch” (a German), he faces the threat of excommunication from his close-knit home community. After years of struggle and scheming to break the lock that binds him to his mother and his Orthodox community, Sender ultimately turns his dream into a nightmarish fight against rigid social conventions and expectations. Unable to overcome his difficulties, Sender is defeated, and the story ends with his premature death.

Without a doubt, the thematic focus of the text holds true to the genre of the ghetto story, whereas its structure corresponds to that of the German *Bildungsroman*. Commonly, a *Bildungsroman* features the coming-of-age story of a young hero in conflict with society who, over several years of growth and personal development, comes to terms with the social realities of life and integrates himself into the existing order. *Der Pojaz* follows this very basic structure of the *Bildungsroman*, but rather than ending his story in the resolution of the conflict, with the hero becoming a productive and accepted member of society, Franzos changes the narrative trajectory of the genre.<sup>93</sup> His protagonist’s struggle to self-cultivate fails in the face of society’s

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<sup>93</sup> Schwarz and Berman in their discussion of *Der Pojaz* point out that Franzos deviates from the model of the *Bildungsroman*, because “der Held mit dem unheroischen, wenn auch symbolischen Namen Sender Glatteis ein armer Judenjunge ist und das Milieu [...] ein ostjüdisches, eingepferchtes Judenstädtel in Podolien mit allen seine Kümernissen und

iron grip on his maturation process. The text's closing suggests a more skeptical, even fatalistic interpretation of the possibility to reconcile personal growth with the societal norms and values prescribed by Jewish Orthodoxy – a conclusion which, in my analysis, sparks and justifies Franzos' idea of external intervention.

Franzos approaches this idea in several steps. First, he lays the groundwork for creating the supposed need for intervention from the outside by focusing on pessimistic depictions of ghetto life and the presumably faulty cultural dispositions of his ghetto Jews. What begins with the sympathetic introduction of the story's "Held" (hero) Sender Glatteis and his family's history quickly advances to a disparaging portrait of Jewishness. As the reader learns, Sender's life begins with the tragic loss of both his "Schnorrer" parents when he is only an infant. Left behind without a home or family, he finds a loving mother in the widow Rosel Kurländer. She is determined to raise the fragile and sensitive child to become a steadfast Jew firmly integrated in the local shtetl community and resistant to the lures of the kind of vagabond lifestyle his parents had lived. The reader quickly realizes a growing conflict between mother and son when Sender's aspirations clash with hers and those of the community. The antithetical characteristics Franzos uses to describe the different factions each of the two characters stands for condense in a nutshell their personal conflict and the dualism between societal norms and individual desires. Sender, the innately intelligent and curious Jewish boy with the vision and heart to strive "mit Aufgebot aller Kraft leidvoll nach einem hohen Ziele"<sup>94</sup> (Pojaz 6), stands in lone contrast to the "Kotstädtchen des Ostens," the "filthy towns of the East," his home town said to be "ein

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Niedrigkeiten." ("the hero with the unheroic name of Sender Glatteis is a poor Jewish boy and the milieu [...] is an Eastern Jewish shtetl in Podolia with all its troubles and sordidness").

<sup>94</sup> "painfully raising all my strength to reach the high goals"



erbärmliches galizisches Judennest”<sup>95</sup> (Pojaz 44) – none of which have anything to offer other than uncompromising parochialism. In a further move, Franzos extends the conflict between individual and community to the conflict between Eastern and Western Jewry. This requires Franzos to demonstrate to the Western reader their own estrangement. Careful not to be identified with the world he depicts, the narrator achieves his distancing by using the language of an objective observer with the expertise of the Orientalist: he talks about “der Jude Halbasiens” (the Jew of Half-Asia), and uses terms such as “dies Volk” (this people), “der Jude” (the Jew), and “der Jude des Ostens” (the Jew of the East; Pojaz, 13-14) to categorize and explain his subject matter. Third person pronouns further accentuate narratorial detachment: pronouns such as “er” (he) and “sein” (his) refer to the Eastern Jew to underscore his strangeness, whereas the phrase “bei uns in Deutschland” (in our Germany) suggests a bond and intimacy with the reader.

As the narrator thus aligns himself with his German audience, he galvanizes its cultural sensibilities. Already within the first pages, Germany and its culture is the implied yardstick against which the Eastern ghetto can only be measured unfavorably. To understand what this yardstick means, it is useful to recall Germany’s place in the world during Franzos’ day: in the 1870s and 1880s, the still young German state boasted not only a vibrant industrial sector and an expansive infrastructure, but also a secularized education system with thriving institutions of higher learning, and an increasingly dynamic social order characterized by a growing and powerful middle-class. These tangible signs of progress and development, I contend, validate the less tangible notions of German superiority. The vocabularies mobilized to construct the difference between Germany as a civilized space versus the East as its outlandish and

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<sup>95</sup> “a pitiful Galician nest of Jews”

uncivilized counterpart are a good example of how Germans understood themselves.<sup>96</sup> Under Bismarck, Germany's backward neighbor Poland became the target of such polarized notions of difference. But even before Bismarck, Gustav Freytag in *Soll und Haben* cast the Poles in thoroughly inferior terms, turning them into an "Oriental" and savage people, as Kontje points out. Similarly, Kristen Kopp (86) in her discussion of the *Ostmarkenroman* genre argues that the genre juxtaposes a "rationally, hierarchically, and morally ordered" German space versus the irrationally ordered Polish space.

Franzos, too, translates notions of German progress into fictions of German superiority and relies on oppositional values to draw up his picture of the ghetto. Germany can be assumed to be all that which the ghetto is not. Measured against the tacit German yardstick, the Jewish ghetto towns are primarily marked by lack: the lack of writings other than the Talmud; the lack of knowledge and progress; the people's inability to read local newspapers and therefore to communicate with the surrounding world. "Im Ghetto," Franzos writes, "gibt es keinen gedruckten Anekdotenschatz, kein Konzert, kein Theater"<sup>97</sup> (Pojaz 14). In fact, it is the diverse body of civilizational treasures and achievements that nurture German cultural conceit in 1890 that Franzos identifies as absent, since "von der modernen Bildung hält ihn ja ebenso der Wille der Machthaber, wie der eigene fromme Wahn fern"<sup>98</sup> (Poaz 14). In the absence of educational tools, the Eastern Jewish ghetto remains an underdeveloped space, yet one full of potential. Its inhabitants are capable of learning, since "der Talmud [...] seinen Verstand bis zur

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<sup>96</sup> Todd Kontje (205), for example, finds textual evidence in Freytag's *Soll und Haben* to argue that this author fashions Poland into Germany's antithesis and advocates "the German conquest of Poland."

<sup>97</sup> "in the ghetto there are no treasures of printed anecdotes, no concert, no theater."

<sup>98</sup> "The will of those in power and his own religious zeal keep him away from modern education"

Spitzfindigkeit geschärft, in ihm einen heissen Wissensdurst erweckt [hat]”<sup>99</sup> (Pojaz 14). Franzos recognizes a great promise in the ghetto Jew and his intellectual abilities, yet considers the ghetto’s isolation and “den starren Panzer [... der] dogmatischen Orhtodoxie,”<sup>100</sup> as Schwarz and Berman (386) claim, an obstacle to the individual’s growth and the source of all backwardness.

As Franzos highlights the pitfalls of Sender’s community, he accentuates the effects of barbaric educational practices and savagery: traditional Jewish institutions of learning, the “cheders,” fail to educate, and are places where “langsam ist da sicherlich manches junge Leben erdrosselt worden: durch die abscheulichen Misshandlungen roher Fanatiker”<sup>101</sup> (Franzos 40). Here “wuchern diese Marterhöhlen für Körper und Geist noch immer fort,” Franzos (40) complains.<sup>102</sup> With such descriptions, Franzos tackles what Schwarz and Berman (386) call the complex of traditions, customs, and clerical hierarchies. Addressing the physical and emotional crippling of the young would be particularly objectionable to the German reader and his bourgeois sensibilities, especially since the formation of the individual through *Bildung* (education) constitutes the centerpiece of the bourgeois ethos, and any practice to the contrary would necessarily seem unsavory. If secular learning is believed to be the path to reach a dignified and emancipated state of being, then its disregard by the shtetl community affiliates these Jews with the ignorant and primitive peoples of foreign places the German reader would

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<sup>99</sup> “the Talmud has sharpened his reasoning skills to the extreme, which has stirred in him a strong thirst for knowledge”

<sup>100</sup> “the inflexible armor of Orthodoxy’s dogmaticism”

<sup>101</sup> “Slowly, many a young life has been choked to death: by way of the terrible torture of brute fanatics”

<sup>102</sup> “continue to this day these dens of torture for body and spirit”

have already met in public and literary discourse, either in the shape of the so-called “Naturvölker” (natural people) in Africa, or of the Slavs and Poles on the continent.<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, Franzos’ suggested comparison between modern German and traditional Jewish culture infers a problematic value judgment. Ranking different cultures on the civilizational ladder comes with consequences and is, according to Jürgen Osterhammel, a basic colonialist tenet. In his discussion *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (1997), Osterhammel points out that hierarchical structures of ordering the world epitomize the colonialist worldview and produce prejudiced and arrested forms of knowledge. Reviews by Franzos’ contemporaries attest to this problematic production of knowledge in *Der Pojaz*. Eduard Engel, in a review from 1906, accepts Franzos’ text as a reliable cultural and historical document he calls a “kulturgeschichtliche Urkunde” about a world he considers exotic, foreign, and primitive: “eine unheimliche Welt voll Aberglauben, Unwissenheit, sittlicher Blindheit tut sich vor uns auf,” he writes, “eine Welt, so seltsam, als läsen wir von wildfremden Völkerschaften, von den Ainos in Japan, von den Feuerländern oder den Papuas”<sup>104</sup> (Glasenapp 496). In a similar vein, the Jewish literary critic Ludwig Philippson comments already in 1876 on the level of culture of Franzos’ Jews in an earlier story entitled *Schiller in Barnow*: “es interessirte uns daher sehr, in diesen Tagen wahrnehmen zu können, dass ein Gleiches wohl schon seit längerer Zeit, besonders aber gegenwärtig bei den galizischen Juden stattfindet, die sich zur Cultur ungefähr auf der Stufe

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<sup>103</sup> Freytag’s novel operated on an oppositional relationship between Poles and Germans, best expressed in Kontje’s reading of the protagonist Anton Wohlfahrt’s sense of self, i.e. “the Poles are both that which he [Anton] is not and that which he fears he might become.”

<sup>104</sup> “a scary world full of superstition, ignorance, moral blindness opens up in front of us, so strange a world as if we were reading about alien peoples, from the Ainos in Japan, from the people of Fireland or those from Papua.”

befinden, wie unsre Vorfahren im letzten Viertel des vorigen Jahrhunderts”<sup>105</sup> (Glasenapp 458). Such reviews bespeak the distanced perspective and sense of superiority of Franzos’ Western readership. When painting the backwardness of shtetl life with all its repressive consequences for the individual, the message is clear: the ghetto Jew is deficient and needs help to recognize and reach his potential as human. The urgency of the narrator’s request would easily appeal to the Western reader’s paternalistic impulses: he can facilitate the individual’s growth and remedy society’s backwardness.

### **2.3.3 Maintaing, Shifting, and Transgressing the East-West Divide**

The first pages of *Der Pojaz* are thus suffused with the Orientalist ethos. The Eastern ghetto exists as an inferior space in a world apart that seems to validate Germans’ sense of superiority. The narrator is the conduit by which to achieve the ghetto’s displacement, on the one hand, and the reader’s emplacement in his lofty role of dominance, on the other. Once established, the premise of the binary relationship and strict division between the civilized West and the uncivilized East is maintained, yet is eventually undermined, as this section will show.

One method to uphold and justify the concept of the divide is with the help of the geographic map. Said (54) considers the practice of “making geographical distinctions” between a familiar space that is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ and which is ‘theirs’ a common and universal one, but then explains that this particular scheme of ordering space actually defines “the demarcations between Orient and West” (Said 56). In *Der Pojaz*, we find

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<sup>105</sup> “we were interested in learning these days that something similar currently goes on among the Galician Jews, who are at the same cultural level as our forefathers in the last quarter of the previous century”

examples of this particular Orientalist geography. The narrator charts a region he categorically describes with “der Osten” (the East) and “Halbasien” (Half-Asia). Either designation calls to mind the remoteness of the area and highlights its distance and foreignness from the West. “Halbasien”, the narrator explains, covers a vast terrain and reaches deep into Russia and as far South as the Bosphorus and the Black Sea. By the standards of Franzos’ contemporaries, it is synonymous with unboundedness and, to borrow Kontje’s (183) words, belongs to “what nineteenth-century Germans would describe as [... the] barbaric Eastern lands.” Whereas Kontje refers only to the Polish, Slavic, and Russian presence in the East, Franzos adds to this already complex ethnic landscape a distinct Jewish presence. By littering the terrain with countless pockets of Jewish communities without nationally defined borders, he commits them to the “barbaric Eastern lands” Kontje (192) locates in Germany’s “nearest East”, in Poland.

When Franzos draws up the scattered shtetl geography, he seems to emphasize the absence of structures of supra-regional forms of organization. He chooses to accentuate what to his German readers would resemble a primitive and tribal existence and what would compare poorly to their recent success in unifying Germany. At a time when the nation state provides the key framework for German self-understanding, the lack of that framework can only be interpreted to result in presumably substandard forms of community. Since, per Franzos’ suggestion, fixed national structures fail to organize the Jews of the East, their isolation in ghettos only cements already existing notions of their pre-modern existence.

Another method to mark the divide is to relate the shtetl geography to the conditioning of cultural dispositions. In fact, characters are considered the product of their immediate environment and thus its living analogue. Their dispositions are a reflection of their surroundings. Sender’s father Mendelev “Kowner,” for instance, epitomizes the very lack of

structure and organization that is said to characterize the overall Eastern geography. Leading the itinerant life of a “Schnorrer,” he’s a restless nomad with few secondary virtues: “es gibt viele solche Nomaden unter den Juden des Ostens”<sup>106</sup> (Franzos 12), Franzos writes. Their innate “Wanderlust” and “Hang zur Trägheit [and] Arbeitsscheu”<sup>107</sup> (Franzos 13) drive them to constantly move between the shtetl communities and to live off the generosity of their “Kundschaft.”<sup>108</sup> Dispositions thus develop from the internalization of suspect external structures, and the “Schnorrer” provides a perfect example:<sup>109</sup> “das ‘Schnorrertum’ ist eine Erscheinung im Volksleben des Ostens, die so sehr an die eigentümlichen Verhältnisse wie and den Volkscharacter gebunden ist, dass man in aller Welt und Geschichte nichts Gleiches finden könnte”<sup>110</sup> (Pojaz 15). The “Schnorrer’s” nomadic lifestyle and seeming disinclination to work stand in contrast to the positive qualities of German rootedness and hard work so important to bourgeois self-understanding. The most appreciated bourgeois virtues of diligence, discipline, and honesty are missing in this Jewish type: he tells half-truths, refuses to hold a regular job or settle down with a family, and goes vagabonding.

If the “Schnorrer” is the product of his environment, then the ghetto and its inhabitants constitute the social context from which he originates. The foreignness of the geographic space translates into the supposed strangeness of Eastern Jewry. “Jew of Half-Asia” is a category unto himself, and is at home in an exotic world different from anything a German reader would

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<sup>106</sup> “There are many such nomads amongst the Jews of the East”

<sup>107</sup> “inclination to being lazy and shying away from work”

<sup>108</sup> “clientele”

<sup>109</sup> Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus articulates the relationship between the internalization of external structures and internalized dispositions to show how in return they inform individual action.

<sup>110</sup> “The ‘Schnorrer’ life style is a phenomenon from the East, which is tied to the bizarre conditions as much as to the character of the people, so that you couldn’t find anything like it anywhere else in the world.”

know. Thus, his appearances and customs require detailed description: leading a lifestyle in accordance with Jewish kashrut laws, he wears the distinctive Jewish garb replete with kaftan, head covering, and pajes (side hair curls), since “der strenggläubige Jude darf nämlich sein Haupt nicht dem Schermesser beugen, Bart und Wangenlöckchen wachsen, wie Ihnen beliebt, und dürfen nie gekürzt werden”<sup>111</sup> (Pojaz 19). The strangeness of his looks is underscored by the oddity of the names he bears. They linguistically invoke his Oriental otherness: Mosche Rindsbraten, Schlome Rosenthal, Chaim Fragezeichen, Selig Diamant, Naphtali Ritterstolz, Elias Wohlgeruch, Jossele Alpenroth, Rabbi Menasse Kirschenkuchen, or Simche Turteltaub. “Der Jude Halbasiens” fills the role of wonder rabbi, chassid, mendel, cheder teacher, and matchmaker, possessing neither the social or cultural capital, nor the mindset that would enable him to access the modern world. Worse still, the narrator explains, “die Jahre kommen und gehen und werden zu Jahrzehnten, zu Jahrhunderten, immer neue Gebiete des Wissens tauchen auf und unzählige Arbeiter des Geistes mühen sich um sie und häufen sie höher und höher empor, im Osten aber grübeln sie noch heut’ wie im Mittelalter über die Linke des Herrn, den Apfelbiss und die Himmelsleiter”<sup>112</sup> (Pojaz 17). If history is an indication at all, he’s unable to transform himself, as proven by his failure to progress over centuries. Looking to explain the stagnation, the narrator (37) offers his answer, complaining that “Unterricht und Gottesdienst sind ja bei diesem Volke eins.”<sup>113</sup> Equipped with this information, the reader is ready to figure out what seems to be the root of the problem. With secular knowledge excluded from study, the

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<sup>111</sup> “the Orthodox Jew is not allowed to have his head shaved, beard and sidecurls grow as they please and may never be cut”

<sup>112</sup> “The years come and go and turn into decades, into centuries, and more and more new fields of knowledge are opened up by countless scholars and they reach higher and higher, but in the East, people still ponder the ‘left of the lord,’ the original sin, and the stairway to heaven, much like in the Middle Ages.”

<sup>113</sup> “instruction and worship are the same with these people”



ghetto Jew rehearses the same script in circular fashion, without the ability to adjust the curriculum and therefore the trajectory of learning.

Lastly, the premise of a world divided gains force when applied to the dualism between nature and culture. Sender's path in life can be read through this dualism in several ways. For one, once Sender decides to break out of his environment to become "ein Deutsch," he develops a plan to make it happen. Unlike others who abandoned the ghetto, he attempts to import the outside world into his own. For obvious reasons, this is a difficult and dangerous endeavor, for it is understood to pose an existential threat to his community. Despite warnings, Sender strikes a deal and initiates a friendship with one of the monks at the local monastery, and therefore is allowed secret and regular access to its library. The books available are the canonical works of German literature and include those by Schiller, Lessing, and Goethe. In an act even worse than reading the books at the library, Sender puts in an order for more books with the merchant in the regional capital. Caught reading and hiding the works in his mother's home, he bears the brunt of the community's wrath, since the infiltration of the community with secular knowledge is feared to have serious consequences. The rabbi, for example, must punish with his ban: "Es war ein Frevel gegen Gott, und den muss ich strafen. Mit den fremden Zeichen schleicht sich der Abfall in die Reihen Israels ein"<sup>114</sup> (Pojaz 166). Worse for Sender, his possession of German books culminates in a tragic scene when his mother feeds them to the flames in an almost barbaric and primitive act of punishment and cleansing. Her contempt for the education of the individual in the humanist tradition matches Western contempt for the limited education the singular focus on religious instruction provides. A performative act, the book burning

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<sup>114</sup> "It was an insult against God, which I must punish. The foreign symbols betray Israel's community"

metaphorically illustrates the perceived antagonism between nature and culture and counterposes the “natural” world of the ghetto against the “civilized” world outside.

Secondly, Sender experiences this dualism in his encounter with nature per se. Determined to pursue his dream in one of the regional urban centers, he one cold night steps out to run away, ignoring the approaching winter storm from the East:

“Hunderte von Meilen erstreckt sich die Ebene gegen Osten, darum hat der Wind, der von dieser Seite weht, eine furchtbare Gewalt, und wächst er zum Sturm an, so bergen sich Mensch und Tier vor seinem tötenden Odem und trauen sich nicht eher hervor, bis er ausgetobt. . . . Wütet er mit voller Wucht, so ist kein Entrinnen vor ihm, und alles Leben, das ihm in die grausamen Fänge gerät, erstickt und verkommt”<sup>115</sup> (Pojaz 278).

Although Sender finds shelter for the night in a lone chapel along the wayside, he aggravates his latent case of pneumonia and falls seriously ill once he reaches his destination the following day. Quite literally, the unbridled forces of nature are cruel and powerful and have the ability to destroy Sender and his belongings.

Beyond its literal meaning, though, the text also invites a figurative reading of nature’s brutal force. Understood this way, the cultural wasteland of the ghetto finds its counterpart in the wilderness of the landscape. Combined, the backward ghetto and the hostile physical environment metaphorically exemplify the dangers of living without the protective layer of culture and civilization. A scene from the last pages detailing Sender’s escape enacts this threat. Sender is exposed to the hazards of nature both in the guise of his community at home and in the shape of the storm when on the open road. To emphasize the causal relationship between

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<sup>115</sup> “Hundreds of miles stretch the plains in an Easternly direction; that is why the wind, which always comes from this side, has such strong force, and if it grows into a storm, man and animal must take cover from its deathly breath and may not dare to reemerge until it has died down. . . . If it rages with full force, there is no escaping, and all life in its path suffocates and dies.”

ghetto mentality and threat to the individual's growth, Franzos' destructive storm moves from the Eastern to the Western direction, and thus from the land of the "barbarians" towards the safehaven of Western civilization. Already a negative foil for all things German, the East seems a source of evil, and nothing good can come from it. Here, Franzos' scenario parallels the colonialist imagination Kristin Kopp (67) observes in German cultural texts with regards to Poland: "references to a Polish (or Slavic) flood were frequent in late nineteenth-century discourse about the Prussian East and were often accompanied by calls to build 'dams' and 'dikes.'" Franzos, too, employs the imagery of the flood to comment on the ghetto. In a dramatic climax near the story's ending, the bridge in the town of Sender's refuge is washed away by the swollen river full of pack ice; no longer can it span the desolate hinterland, nor can it provide a pathway to the regional centers of civilization. Sender is trapped by both the physical force of nature and by the tenacity of his pursuers: his mother and companions catch up with him and force him to return home. Thus, the ruined bridge has symbolic value beyond blocking Sender's path and stopping him in his tracks. Its wreckage may well serve as a reminder of the danger the ghetto wilderness poses to modern man.<sup>116</sup>

Once the ghetto's backwardness and dangers have been documented, Franzos' reader is primed to believe that an escape from its social determinism is needed and possible. Franzos again relies on the figure of the "Schnorrer," Sender's father, to make a case for shifting the divide. A tramp and comedian, Sender's father is a free spirit outside of the norm who enjoys the benefits of having an unstructured lifestyle behind the ghetto walls and therefore some control over his life. His path, meandering between worlds and without a fixed home to call his

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<sup>116</sup> While Schwarz and Berman (390) read nature's force in terms of "naturalistischem Pessimismus," I read it as an instance of the colonialist imagination.

own in either one, lends itself to the possibility of shifting course. As he travels “Halbasien” peddling his news and stories, the “Schnorrer” links up the many isolated ghetto communities while exposing himself to outside influences. Embodying the intersection of different universes, he possesses the capacity for a more open learning experience. For one, he’s endowed with great talents: “er dünkt sich nicht allein klüger, witziger, gebildeter – das ist er zumeist wirklich –, sondern auch vornehmer als seine Gönner”<sup>117</sup> (Pojaz 15); and two, the “Schnorrer” navigates a liminal space that offers the opportunity to break out of the ghetto’s mold. While Mende Kowner achieves a degree of personal freedom for himself, it is, however, his son, Sender, who embarks on a journey off-course altogether, looking to reach a higher kind of life experience through education and personal growth. Where the “Schnorrer’s” type symbolizes the capacity for change and the porousness of the ghetto walls, Sender’s character – his direct offspring – represents the route to transgressing boundaries and setting an example for others to attain the goal they share.

#### **2.3.4 Of Models and Mimicry**

Franzos’ experiment at redeeming aspects of Oriental Jewishness is realized through the introduction of several possible models. This section discusses the alternative each of these models represents. Franzos’ character line-up not only embodies the different methods for reinscribing Jewishness, but also acts out the options on the theater stage. Different models come with different benefits and risks, yet each one strives to turn from Oriental Jew to German

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<sup>117</sup> “He not only thinks of himself as smarter, wittier and more educated – and rightfully so – but also more refined than his patrons”

and involves the copying and internalizing of German language and culture. This copying of the language, manners, and values of the supposedly superior culture by the minority is a form of “mimicry,” a term operative in colonial discourse theory and playing center stage in Homi Bhabha’s system. He understands mimicry as a tool in the hand of the colonized that allows them to become “authentic” and identical with the colonizer and his fetishized culture. While to some extent this is a desirable outcome for both colonizer and colonized, the resulting similarity between the two also has unpopular consequences. Bhabha (LC 122) theorizes this unease in their relationship in terms of “ambivalence,” i.e. the tension between the colonizer’s pleasure in being copied and the mimicry actually practiced by the colonized. As the colonized appropriate the colonizer’s culture, he argues, they distort the modalities of dominant discourse and thus produce what Bhabha (LC 126) calls “a partial vision of the colonizer’s presence”. This turns out to be a rather disturbing experience for the colonizer and his self-understanding. In fact, the exaggerated mimicking of language and manners produces what he calls the slippage of colonial discourse, which challenges the colonizer’s “desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, LC 122).

Whereas Bhabha interprets mimicry to result in agency for the colonized – a form of resistance in response to the colonizer’s dominant position – Franzos seems to complicate Bhabha’s concept. His models produce moments of slippage and ambivalence of varying intensities and with outcomes that qualify and undercut the prospect of agency. While he, too, advocates the practice of mimicry, he carefully distinguishes between different modes of mimicking. He then puts them on stage for the scrutiny of the reader and as examples to follow or to avoid. Drawing attention to mimicry as a performance by staging its mechanisms, he

actually proves the contingencies of mimicry Bhabha ignores. In the end, Franzos generates a nuanced template for reimagining Oriental Jewishness.

After establishing the need for outside intervention in the opening chapters of *Der Pojaz*, the text's itinerary turns to actually remedying the civilizational want in the Eastern ghetto by way of cultural colonization and education. Sender Glatteis becomes the prototype to champion and test what resembles the ideal of "improvement and cultural betterment" that Sebastian Conrad (155) considers so dear to the German colonial project in Africa or China<sup>118</sup> in Franzos' day. Long-stated precondition for Jewish emancipation since Mendelssohn, the ideal is not new to Jews, although Franzos delivers a concrete example of how to make it work.<sup>119</sup> He expands upon the idea of educating the natives when he merges colonialism's principle of bringing Western civilization to the colonies with the "Bildungsideal" of the new German middle class – a unique and different take on the colonial project. Adopting the German educational tenets of the time, Franzos first encourages the study of the German language to make accessible the body of literature borne from the German Enlightenment and Weimar Classicism. Deemed the source of the "deutschen Weisheit"<sup>120</sup> (Pojaz 70), these works, Franzos suggests, can spark the individual's growth and eventually transform Jews into emancipated human beings. After all, Sender had been deeply affected by his first visit to a theater performance: "als veränderter Mensch kam Sender in sein armseliges Heimatstädtchen zurück . . . . Es war eine wilde Energie

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<sup>118</sup> Sebastian Conrad (112) argues that "the goal of 'elevation' covered a wide range of different measures, many of which were imposed despite local resistance. They included the teaching of reading and writing and of German culture in the newly founded schools . . ."

<sup>119</sup> The debates between 1776 and the early 1800s surrounding the Prussian civil servant Wilhelm von Dohm, the Goettingen Orientalist Johann David Michaelis, and the Berlin court official Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Grattenauer exemplify the controversial and conflicting perspectives on Jewish regeneration. Jonathan Hess, in *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity* (2002), outlines the arguments.

<sup>120</sup> "German wisdoms"

in ihm wach geworden, die er selbst einige Tage vorher nimmer in sich geahnt haette . . .”<sup>121</sup> (Pojaz 68). As a result of his catalytic experience, Sender is determined to heed the advice the theater’s director, Nadler, had given him: “und lerne Deutsch – das ist das Wichtigste – lesen, schreiben und sprechen”<sup>122</sup> (Pojaz 66). If he wants to grow and satisfy his intellectual thirst he must learn German: “er wollte und musste hochdeutsch sprechen, und es gelang ihm mit der Zeit auch überraschend gut. Sein merkwürdiges Nachahmungstalent kam ihm da vortrefflich zu statten”<sup>123</sup> (Pojaz 82). Once he concludes that the knowledge gained from the “Konversationslexikon oder enzyklopädisches Realwörterbuch” (conversation or encyclopedic dictionary) from 1846 pays off (“er gab das Lesen nicht auf, so lange es anging! Es schien keinen Nutzen zu haben, aber war er gebildet, war er ein ‘Deutsch,’ stand ihm darüber ein Urteil zu”<sup>124</sup> [Pojaz 124]), Sender believes that mastering German will allow him to reason, argue, and judge. In Sender’s mind, the German language is the pivotal part of the tool kit needed by the Oriental Jew to lift himself out of his inferior existence. Although the path to reading “die ‘Weltgeschichte,’ das ‘Lesebuch,’ vor allem aber der Schlüssel zu seinem Paradies – der ‘Katechismus der Schauspielkunst’”<sup>125</sup> (Pojaz 138) is arduous and requires the study of the “Deutschen Sprachlehre” (German grammar) first, the promised reward for his hard work is entry into a higher and more mature level of being.

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<sup>121</sup> “Sender returned to his desolate hometown as a transformed human being . . . . A wild energy had awakened in him, an energy which he could never have imagined just days earlier”

<sup>122</sup> “and learn German – that is most important – reading, writing, and speaking”

<sup>123</sup> “he wanted and had to speak high German, and he succeeded quite nicely with time. His strange talent to imitate came in handy”

<sup>124</sup> “he would not give up reading as long as he could! It didn’t seem to be of use, but once he was educated, he was a German and he would be in a position to judge”

<sup>125</sup> “the world history, the reader, but most of all the key to his paradise – the catechism of acting”

By contrast, Yiddish, the everyday language of the ghetto Jews, shows to determine much of the ghetto's presumed backward social order. A product of the community's social interactions, it also constitutes the very framework for ghetto life. Fishman (20) in his discussion of the politics of Yiddish in the 19<sup>th</sup> century explains that the predominantly negative attitude toward the language precluded an "ideological basis for the emergence of a modern Yiddish culture" and, together with a set of policies regulating the use of Yiddish, retarded a cultural rebirth.<sup>126</sup> Yiddish, from Sender's perspective, is a limiting instrument and, worse yet, cannot afford an experience of the world behind the ghetto walls. It restricts interactions with the outside world, since communication is only possible with the help of translators and intermediaries. The scribes Dovidl Morgenstern and Luisner, for example, are the two "Winkelschreiber" (Pojaz 173) exercising such mediating function in Barnow. In all questions of administrative or legal matters, the shtetl Jews can only speak by proxy with their local authorities, and, therefore, from an inferior position. Moreover, the lack of language seems to translate into a lack of voice – a deficiency Sender observes in his peers but experiences himself when he fails to understand the gentile folks in town and struggles to effectively communicate. Cognizant of the limitations of Yiddish, Sender is primed to believe that German not only allows for access to modern thought, but also empowers the individual to take charge of his life.

The lack of voice is compounded by the apparent uselessness of the knowledge gained through the study of Hebrew as the language of scripture and Jewish learning. The "cheders," the traditional Jewish schools, are irreconcilable with the idea of the German "Gymnasium," with its humanist curriculum: "totgeschlagen ist im 'Cheder' noch niemand worden, trösteten

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<sup>126</sup> David E. Fishman (23) further discusses the process of gradual endorsement of Yiddish as "legitimate cultural medium" by a growing number of writers, Sholem Aleichem and I.L. Peretz being the most notable converts to this perspective.



sich die Leute, und das mag wahr sein, sofern man einen schlichten, klaren, durch den Galgen zu bestrafenden Mord meint” (Franzos 40), but they are “Marterhöhlen für Körper und Geist” (Pojaz 40) and well suited “auch den wildesten Trotz zu brechen.”<sup>127</sup> Neither Yiddish nor Hebrew is understood to contribute positively to the individual’s intellectual and emotional development, in stark contrast to the potential and educational qualities of German. This belief, it seems, informs the colonizing aspect of Franzos’ missionary project. Thought to be a positive influence, the linguistic colonization of the ghetto, however, is met with great resistance. The collective grasps the consequences of learning the dominant culture’s language in fully negative terms: “Deutsch lesen und schreiben ist ein Makel fürs ganze Leben, noch mehr – ein Gift ist es! Wer darf mit Gift umgehen? Der Apotheker. Luise muss es können, weil er die Matrikel zu führen hat, und David Morgenstern wegen der Prozesse. Aber für jedes andere jüdische Kind, ob Mann, ob Weib, ist es Todsünde”<sup>128</sup> (Pojaz 157). In the tension between Sender’s push for and the ghetto’s push back against German, we recognize a problem typical of the colonial relationship more generally. Frantz Fanon, for example, in the context of French colonialism, theorizes the consequences of speaking the colonizer’s language: “to speak . . . means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (17-8). For Fanon, language presents itself as a key element of colonizing structures. Whereas for the ghetto community the assimilation into foreign ideas through language is a question of coercion undermining its ability to speak on its own terms in Fanon’s sense, for Sender, it is a question of the individual’s

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<sup>127</sup> “No one has been beaten to death at the cheder, people thought, and that may well be true when talking about the kind of simple and straightforward death punishable by hanging”, but there are “torture chambers for body and mind” and well suited “to break the wildest resistance”

<sup>128</sup> “Reading and writing German stigmatizes for life, even more – it is a poison! Who is allowed to handle poison? The pharmacist. Luise must know how to handle poison, because he has to keep the books, and David Morgenstern because of legal processes. But, for any other Jewish child, no matter if man or woman, it is a deathly sin.”

agency and maturity. Rather than being a ‘poison’, the German language is an antidote to the ghetto’s backwardness. It can fertilize the mind of the ghetto Jew with cultural and civilizational values that lie outside of his lived reality. Such contrasting attitudes prove that multiple and polarized perspectives of (linguistic) colonization are feasible even within the minority culture.

In contradistinction to the collective, Sender appreciates the study of German for its potential. Eager to transform himself into a German, he decides to take his mimicry to the next level. The linguistic aspect of mimicry is thus meaningfully amplified by Sender’s physical mimicry. The conversion signals a shift in the intensity of Sender’s resolve and mimicry, and will force his proscription. Upon his escape from the ghetto wilderness and arrival in town, Sender adopts the physical traits of man in civilization. First on his agenda is the removal of the facial hair and side curls, the pajes, which are part of the ghetto Jew’s visual stigmata. Reasoning “ob ich mich hier ganz zum ‘Deutsch’ mache oder erst in Czernowitz, ist ja gleichgültig. Dann erkennt mich keiner mehr. Er trat in eine Barbierstube und liess sich das Haar stutzen, den Schnurr- und Backenbart abrasieren. . . . Zuerst die Löckchen[!]”<sup>129</sup> (Pojaz 290). It is hard to miss the symbolic meaning of this shaving ritual. Shaving off the signs of difference is a radical act of cleansing and also one of defiance: it serves to purge his origins and take control of his destiny. The embodied shift from Oriental Jew to German through physical cleansing resonates in colonial practices in Africa. The German civilizing mission, according to Conrad (112), focused on “the introduction and maintenance of a regime of hygiene” among the natives that was thought to foster their process of development. Franzos submits a similar proposal for his civilizing mission in the East. Sender hopes to unshackle

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<sup>129</sup> “if I become German here or in Czernowtiz, that’s all the same. Then nobody will recognize me any more. He entered a barbershop and had his hair cut, the moustache and beard. . . . First the hair curls[!]”

himself from his primitive origins through the purgative act of shaving and the Westernization of his dress. The physical change thus begun is only complete with the shortening of his kaftan to adjust its length “um auch ihn ‘deutsch’ zu machen”<sup>130</sup> (Pojaz 275), and with the purchase of a “deutschen Anzug und einen modern geschnittenen Mantel”<sup>131</sup> (Pojaz 290). With these vivid images, Franzos stages each step of the redemptive physical transformation – a symbolic performance of Sender’s emotional and intellectual maturation process.

Uncomfortably aware of his mimicry at first, Sender feels strange about his unaccustomed dress – a self-conscious discomfort expressed linguistically in the words “eine ungewohnte Tracht.”<sup>132</sup> Yet, the costume allows him to pass as German: “im nächsten Laden, beim Hutmacher, wurde er bereits mit ‘Herr’ angesprochen, also wohl gar nicht mehr als Jude erkannt”<sup>133</sup> (Pojaz 291). Witnessing Sender’s gradual transformation and acceptance as German by others, we learn much about Franzos’ notion of ethnic and cultural identity: it is a performance similar to that of an actor – “ein Schauspieler” – and is a role anyone with the right attitude can master through striving and the copying of language, dress, and manners. Put differently, there’s nothing “natural” about being German, nor, by extension, about being Jewish. Calling into question any essentializing definitions of Germanness or Jewishness, ethnic and cultural identity are understood to be choices and constructions that are subject to negotiation. Sender’s choice to become German challenges accounts of collective identity premised on a group’s assumed homogeneity and autonomy. Rather than subscribing to the idea of the community’s immutability, Sender’s example shows ethnic and cultural identity as

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<sup>130</sup> “in order to make him German, too”

<sup>131</sup> “German suit and a modern style overcoat”

<sup>132</sup> “an unfamiliar costume”

<sup>133</sup> “in the next store, at the hatter’s, people already addressed him as ‘sir,’ thus they didn’t recognize the Jew in him any more”

mutable and subject to change. By consequence, it allows for different kinds of identity within the group to exist.

Yet, there is another important point to Sender's challenge. Despite the underlying rejection of Oriental Jewishness in Sender's actions, his path may not require him to discard his ethnic and cultural roots in their entirety. Franzos profits from theater's educational function to make his point. With the stage as the perfect venue for learning, Sender joins a theater company and carefully observes the different actors. He quickly comes to understand the complexities of mimicry in the varying outcomes he witnesses. One such example is that of the failed actor Können, alias Kohn, who turns out to be slavishly chained to the low-grade and burlesque "Schmierentheater" of director Stickler. As Sender strikes up a conversation with him, he learns that Können had abandoned his Jewish roots and family long ago, hoping to break free from his Jewish Orthodox roots through immersion into the educational experience of German theater. An avowed mimic of all things German, who has invested his life and savings in his dream of *being* German, Können actually demonstrates the flaws and pitfalls of mimicry:

Zur Tür herein schob sich ein kleiner, hagerer Mensch in dürrtiger Kleidung, so recht der Typus eines armseligen gedrückten Juden. [. . .]: es war doch ein ganz merkwürdig hässliches Gesicht. Unter der niedrigen, zurückfliegenden Stirne, in die sich krauses, pechschwarzes Haar drängte, sassen zwei kleine, melancholische Äuglein, zwischen ihnen sprang eine Riesennase kühn hervor, als wollte sie einen Fuss lang werden, zog sich dann aber, wie über ihr eigenes, tolles Vorhaben entsetzt, in jäher Krümmung zu den dünnen Lippen nieder; dafür sprang aber das Kinn wieder kräftig hervor. "Wenn der Franz Moor ein Jud wär," dachte Sender, "diese Maske würd ich mir für ihn nehmen."<sup>134</sup> (Pojaz 298)

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<sup>134</sup> A small, skinny person in miserable clothing squeezed through the door, the type of a poor and depressed Jew. [...]: it was a rather strange, ugly face. Under his low and retreating forehead, which was framed by curly, pitch black hair, sat two small, melancholic eyes, a huge nose boldly protruding between them, as if it wanted to grow a whole foot long. However, it bent abruptly down – as if shocked by its own intent – towards a thin pair of lips; but then, the chin protruded. "If Franz Moor were Jewish," thought Sender, "this is the mask I'd choose for him."

Not only does Sender immediately recognize the Oriental Jew in Können, but, unfortunately for the actor, so does the audience. Können confides in Sender his frustration over his lack of acting skills and the fact that his nose reliably marks his Jewishness, defying his German stage name. “Aber wissen Sie, was mich am meisten gekränkt hat? Dass mich die Leute ‘Kohn’ gerufen haben. . . . Wer eine solche Nase hat, . . . der trägt ja gewissermassen den Namen im Gesicht”<sup>135</sup> (Pojaz 318), he says. In this case, Jewishness is inscribed in the body in the form of a physical feature from which there can be no escape. Können’s example calls to mind the discourse of race emerging in Germany in the 1870s, which Davis (14-5) holds liable for “defining Jewishness as a matter of race rather than faith” and for “seeding doubts about the possibility of Jews ever becoming fully Germanized.” Unable to hide behind any mask – “ich könnte doch vernünftig werden und einsehen, dass sich eine solche Nase nicht wegschminken lässt”<sup>136</sup> – Können experiences time and again the embarrassment of being uncovered as an imposter and caricature. His desperate and exaggerated performance leads only to mockery and ridicule. Although Franzos resorts to physiognomic markers to describe Können’s failures, the point he wants to make is not necessarily in line with the tenets of racial discourse. The chief distinction is one of symbolic value. Whereas in the discourse of race, the nose essentializes Jewish otherness, Franzos offers up an alternative. In more abstracted terms, Franzos’ “Jewish nose” serves as a reminder or symbol of ethnic origins. Neither the Jewish nose, nor ethnic origins should be erased for mimicry to be effective in the way Sender envisions.

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<sup>135</sup> “But you know what hurt me the most? The fact that people called me ‘Kohn’ . . . . Whoever carries such a nose . . . carries to a certain extent his name in his face.”

<sup>136</sup> “I could become reasonable and admit that such a nose cannot be masked.”

Quite differently from Können, the actor Bogumil Dawison serves as a positive role model. Dawison is a widely celebrated and revered actor, a Jew from Eastern Europe much like Sender, yet one who has already reached his transmuted state of emancipated being. His mimicry seems to fit the ideal and renders him and his performance authentic and credible. He manages to be the perfect and accepted mimic while also being a Jew, as his Jewish name (no stage name) and his Shylock master role prove. By acknowledging his Jewishness and thus leaving intact the sign of difference, he emerges in the shape of Bhabha's (LC 122) "reformed, recognizable Other" – "a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite." At Sender's deathbed, Dawison compares himself to Sender and his choice of path, and, given his success in life, validates his [Dawison's] model status: "Unsere Schicksale sind einander so ähnlich," sagte er. 'Kampf mit der Armut und dem Vorurteil! Freilich habe ich das Polnische in einer Schule erlernen können . . . . Und das Deutsche habe ich auch als Schreiber in der Redaktion der "Gazeta" aus eigener Kraft erlernen müssen. Und es ist doch gegangen! Ich hoffe, das wird Ihnen trostreich sein, lieber Kollege'"<sup>137</sup> (Pojaz 354).

On yet another, even more advanced, level of acculturation and emancipation, we find the theater director Nadler, who incarnates the modern German Jew: "'Höre,' sagt er, 'du hast es nicht erkannt, aber ich bin selbst ein Jude. Freilich aus einem anderen Land, aus Preussen'"<sup>138</sup> (Pojaz 66). In Nadler's case, his Jewish ethnicity is no longer visible or perceptible, because he has become fully "ein Deutsch." His figure can best be understood in its

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<sup>137</sup> "'Our fates are so similar,' he said. 'Struggles against poverty and prejudice! Of course, I could learn Polish in school . . . . And I learned German on my own when I was a scribe at the editorial office of the "Gazeta." And it worked despite all! I hope that will be of comfort to you, dear colleague'"

<sup>138</sup> "'Listen,' he said, 'you did not see it, but I'm also a Jew. Of course, from a different country, from Prussia'"

German historical context: in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an increasingly and highly acculturated Jewish middle and upper-middle class was produced. Franzos' character Nadler is representative of that class of German Jews – a class that was well on its way to evolving into a species unto itself, one distinct and divorced from the ghetto Jew. As Amos Elon (271) points out, the Eastern Jewish immigrants who moved into Germany after the Russian pogroms of 1881 “embarrassed the assimilated [Jews] by reminding them of their forebears.”<sup>139</sup> Aware of his privileged status, Nadler, in a generous and compassionate gesture, offers Sender an apprenticeship as actor at the *Lemberger Deutsches Theater*, where Nadler has accepted the directorship for the fall of the year of Sender's death. In this new professional capacity, the German Jew Nadler can be an enabler of civilizational change and bring Western values to the East. Entrusting the German Jew to be a positive force and a kind of “Kulturträger” – a carrier of German language and culture – Franzos envisions him functioning as the authentic, authorized, and fully endorsed agent in his civilizing mission in the East.

Along his path, Sender has learned that responsible mimicry (as opposed to unconditional or blind mimicry), combined with a proper education made accessible through German culture, affords an enlightened and “elevated” existence. The assumption that an Eastern Jew can successfully transform himself into a German – the German as a stand-in for the mature and emancipated being – through mimicry unsettles the idea of what it means to be German. Being “ein Deutsch” turns out to be a fluid category contingent upon knowledge anyone with the right attitude can attain. It is neither limited to those born within the borders of

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<sup>139</sup> Amos Elon (271) notes that “Gustav Mahler wrote to his wife from Lvov (Lemberg) that Polish Jews ‘run about this place as dogs do elsewhere . . . . God almighty, and I am supposed to be related to them,’ further adding that ‘Rathenau had already fulminated against this “Asiatic horde.” With their earlocks, unkempt beards, and seedy caftans, they conjured up the old ghetto.’”

Germany proper, nor reserved for those of “German blood.” Rather, being German is a state of mind expressed in language, culture and style – something portable, exportable, and therefore also subject to local interpretations. In this point, Franzos’ project digresses from Germany’s civilizing mission in Africa. Whereas colonialist practice in Africa “was to perpetuate hierarchical differences . . . by essentializing alterity and thus treating differences between peoples and cultures as unchanging” (Conrad 108), and the point of educating the indigenous populations was “to create perfect ‘natives,’ not black Europeans,” as Conrad argues, Franzos turns such core ideologies on their heads. Russell Berman (EZ 24) claims that “die deutsche Kolonialpolitik hat hingegen nur sehr selten versucht, die einheimischen Bevölkerungen zu germanisieren.”<sup>140</sup> Franzos defies those German colonial policies that deny the “Germanification” of the native populations. Through Franzos we come to understand that the cultural colonization in the East generates local variations of Germanness. Such local avatars resist notions of essentialized difference and the immutability of ascribed identities. The juxtapositioning of actors from opposite poles of the mimicry spectrum illustrates the effectiveness and failures of mimicry. It suggests that the subject’s otherness must be integrated into its chosen identity. Unrestrained by his Jewish origins and equally unmotivated to contemplate his conversion to Christianity or move to Germany, Sender’s character proposes a new version of Germanness. It combines features of the Oriental Jew and the German. Reading this proposal within its historical context, we come to recognize its provocation to emerging definitions of German national identity in the 1880s. Not only does it produce “new signs of

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<sup>140</sup> “German colonial policies only rarely attempted at Germanizing the indigenous peoples.” Berman (EZ 24-5) further argues that “Untersuchungen zur deutschen Sprachpolitik in Togo belegen zum Beispiel, dass die Versuche, die deutsche Sprache zu verbreiten, erst spät und dann auch nur halbherzig unternommen wurden.”



identity” for Jews in late-nineteenth century, in the way Leo Riegert (351) reads Franzos, but Franzos’ alternative model of the Oriental Jew undermines signs of identity thought stable, unified, and exclusive and refashions the premise of identity for Germans.

## **2.4 CONCLUSION**

Franzos and Kompert’s representations of the Eastern ghetto couldn’t be more different. In Franzos, the reader finds a stereotyped traditional Jewish world, replete with all the components of a culture perceived as primitive and inferior and doomed in its backwardness unless it opens up to Western ideas. Conversely, Kompert presents the traditional Jewish world less distinguished by its fundamental otherness than by its inherent similarity to Western bourgeois culture. Despite these axiomatic differences, the texts share an important feature: they are refracted through the Orientalist and colonialist gaze, each appropriating and adapting respective knowledge to creatively rework the meaning of the Oriental ghetto within the discourse of Jewish emancipation. Thus, both authors add their unique voices and visions by articulating their emancipatory projects through the mechanism of self-Orientalization. In the process, their works do not merely reproduce Western Orientalisms, but they also inform German Orientalist projections in ways that revise accepted definitions for the German context. Rather than judging Kompert and Franzos to be just additional voices in the chorus of writers of ghetto stories who wish to eliminate the ghetto Jew, I understand them to productively contribute to and employ Orientalist and colonialist modes of representation, defining and repurposing its structures to promote Jewish renewal.

These writings result from contemporary concerns and address the needs of their German and Germanized or acculturating readers to counter the gentile Orientalizing gaze, which aims at shackling them to their allegedly “Oriental” origins.<sup>141</sup> Embedded in the cultural discourses of the times, the texts in one way or another seek to recast Orientalized Jewishness, making it clear that the Oriental Jew can neither be reduced to the stereotype, nor be compatible with the modern world in his traditional incarnation. Kompert’s trope of a sanitized (and Germanized) Orient located in the past is matched by Franzos’s trope of the civilizing mission in the East. Endowing the Oriental Jew with a human face and noble character that compares favorably to the German, Kompert, for one, expands a limited cast of Eastern Jewish characters known to the Western reader in 1848. Here, the Eastern ghetto appears in the guise of the West, the assumedly primitive Oriental Jew now a not quite faithful copy of his Western counterpart. Blurring the boundaries between presumed Eastern backwardness and Western civilization, Kompert’s Jews remain distinctly Jewish while approximating their German models. Kompert thus transforms a space of inferiority into a space that was – while different and Oriental – never quite as inferior as the West had led us to believe. In this sense, there is a disruptive moment in Kompert’s writing. It allows us to think of his form of mimicry in terms of the production of another knowledge of a culture’s norms, as Bhabha suggests – a challenge to Germans’ sense of exclusive ownership of German culture and of authority over their national identity. However, despite espousing a sympathetic tone, Kompert proposes a less sympathetic

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<sup>141</sup> Anna-Dorothea Ludewig in *Zwischen Czernowitz und Berlin* approaches Franzos’ oeuvre from an autobiographical perspective to focus on it as an extension of the author’s self-positioning and identity construction and foregrounds the “Wechselwirkung zwischen Leben und Werk” (15) (“the interplay between his life and work”). She emphasizes Franzos’ career of a “Berufsschriftsteller” (“professional writer”) and “Brotschriftsteller” (someone who writes to earn his daily bread), who was under constant pressure to produce and adjust his writing to the tastes of the public.

ending when silencing his Jews by relegating the ghetto to history. His Orientalist gaze temporally displaces the Eastern Jew, transposing him into a chapter of the past and into a location that has lost its specific geographic coordinates.

By contrast, Franzos' *Der Pojaz* takes a different approach. This author's cultural bias targets the relative backwardness of the Eastern ghetto to emphasize the fundamental rift between West and East. Unlike in the earlier Kompert, Franzos' Eastern shtetls are real spaces to be found on the geographic map and counter-positioned to a modern Western geography. Traditional Eastern Jewry exists contemporaneously with acculturated Western Jewry. Building the case for a civilizing mission to reform and irrigate a presumed wasteland, Franzos makes a daring proposal when he entrusts the acculturated German Jew with the task of transforming his "Oriental" peers into Germans by way of cultural colonization or, to borrow Russell Berman's notion, by way of "cultural and ideological penetrations."<sup>142</sup> Franzos sees no alternative, since Sender's premature death symbolizes the infirmity of the community and the barrenness of the ghetto. Accordingly, the doctor who cares for Sender's physical and emotional wounds in his last days explains to his mother that "nichts hätte für seine Krankheit schlimmer sein können, als diese Rückkehr. Dort wollte er leben, und hier will er sterben"<sup>143</sup> (Pojaz 342). The ending's message, with the questionable victory for the ghetto community, seems to confirm assumptions among Germans that the Other is unable to progress.<sup>144</sup> Yet, Franzos' model of mimicry tells us also otherwise: he establishes that under proper guidance and within the "right" (i.e. German)

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<sup>142</sup> Russell Berman believes German colonialism to be an instance of cultural and ideological penetrations rather than one of military occupation or economic domination.

<sup>143</sup> "nothing could have been worse for his disease than this return home. Over there, he wanted to live and over here, he wants to die"

<sup>144</sup> Davis (85) describes perceptions of African otherness among Germans during the colonial movement and their "unusual inability to progress and change."

cultural environment, Jews are mature human beings while retaining signs of their Jewish otherness.

Both Kompert and Franzos functionalize Orientalist and colonialist tropes to destabilize the binary typology in 19<sup>th</sup> century representations of Jewishness. Yielding ambiguous results, they both displace the Oriental Jew, only to reimagine him with a new set of qualities and attributes. Their examples of the reformed traditional Jew challenge Jewish *and* German self-understanding, the subjectivities they create proving the vulnerability and instability of all identities.

### **3.0 “DER GEBRAUCHTE JUDE”: MAXIM BILLER AND GERMANY’S NEW JEWRY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Jewish writing in Germany after the Holocaust is a reflection of multiple postwar discourses and negotiates Jewishness in this uniquely German context. Still, the historic watershed looms large and overshadows any attempt at capturing what it means to be Jewish in Germany. It is the lens through which Jews and Germans have viewed and understood each other ever since. However, with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, we witness another landmark event that has not only introduced a new set of topics into public debate, but that seems to coincide with a gradual and marked shift in Jewish self-perceptions. My second chapter concerns itself with the aesthetic articulation of this shift in Jewish writing and examines the Jewish minority’s re-positioning in the work of Maxim Biller – a figure at the threshold of an “process of reassessment” (Remmler/Gilman 6) – whose work spans the launch of the Berlin Republic and reaches into the present.

To be sure, the Jewish position always was and continues to be multi-vocal, offering insights into a range of Jewish topics. If, for example, members of the so-called first postwar generation have focused on the potential threat a politically and economically empowered and geographically enlarged Germany could pose to German Jews and their post-Shoah status of

victimhood,<sup>145</sup> the stakes for members of the second or even third generation have been as much about projecting their own Jewishness into this new Germany as about incorporating in one way or another the richness of the Jewish experience from the past.<sup>146</sup> The prose of Maxim Biller – representative of the third generation of German Jews – exemplifies the tenets of the discourse of Jewishness in Germany since 1989 and adopts as its point of intervention, I maintain, a literary return to the Jewish ghetto and Orientalized Jewishness. Unmistakable symbols of the Jewish past, these figures are a framing element of Jewish diasporic life in the new Germany, as my analysis shows. In particular, I examine how, from his liminal position as minority writer and Jew in Germany, Biller adopts self-Orientalization practices as a vehicle for Jewish identity formation and introduces notions of the ghetto as a model for a supra-national consciousness, turning the German Jewish diaspora into a cipher of the “new European.” In appropriating a practice with a contentious history for his contemporary project, Biller challenges us to consider how the ghetto and ghetto Jew inform present debates and contribute, from the Jewish periphery, to a German discourse of multiculturalism that Deniz Goektürk, David Gramling and Anton Kaes, in *Germany in Transit* (17), identify as a “transnational project.”

Maxim Biller’s writing presents a valuable site from which to observe the textual generation of meaning in this process, rather than serving as a sociological account or historically correct source of knowledge. In fact, his texts thrive on the aesthetic tension between fact and fiction that is made productive to address history’s scars and topical issues in

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<sup>145</sup> These concerns are documented in the discourse of “normalization” and German victimhood, undermining the authority of the tenet of Jewish victimhood.

<sup>146</sup> A number of anthologies (Stern, Remmler/Gilman, Bodemann, Herzog/Gilman, Lappin) and monographs (Gilman, Bornemann/Peck) thematizing Jewish life in the new Germany were published in the early 1990s. Since then, many of those scholars have continued their investigations to add to or update their earlier insights.

unexpected ways. With this tension in mind, several questions arise: what kind of Jewishness does Biller envision, and what kind of space does his model of the ghetto make available to the Jewish minority in Germany? How is this space aligned with notions of the multicultural, the transnational, the postnational, or the cosmopolitan – descriptors so popular in characterizing the minority condition in the age of globalization? What kind of loyalties and categories of belonging – be they pluralistic, multiple, in-between, hybrid, or deterritorialized – become visible therein? Before I address these questions in the discussion of texts culled from Biller's oeuvre, I will briefly outline the literary tradition of German Jewish writing in the postwar years to both contextualize his work within a larger literary discourse and to emphasize the rupturing effect Biller, as a public intellectual, and his distinctive hand has had on this postwar tradition.

Most of today's accounts about German Jewish writing since 1945 begin by referencing Theodor Adorno's dictum of the impossibility of writing poetry after Auschwitz, or by quoting Dan Diner's 1986 essay about the "negative symbiosis,"<sup>147</sup> only to follow up with the observation that, in fact, "Jewish writers never stopped writing in German" (Gilman/Zipes xxi) and that "there has been a veritable renaissance in German-Jewish literature by writers born after the Holocaust" (McGlothlin 230) whose works even constitute "tentative gestures towards a kind of rapprochement with German society" (McGlothlin 243). It is the seeming paradox of Jews living in Germany and/or writing in the German language after the Holocaust that provides the inspiration for this literature and informs scholarly efforts at defining and structuring a rather diverse body of textual production. Organizational criteria vary greatly, yet all draw upon

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<sup>147</sup> Dan Diner in 1986 famously coined the term "negative symbiosis" to counter the 19<sup>th</sup> century notion of the "German Jewish symbiosis," which, as he argues, was a figment of the Jewish imagination and never reciprocated.

the dialectical relationship between Jewish writing and German culture, thus firmly embedding the literary productions in historical processes and cultural discourses.

In the immediate postwar years, much of this writing was actually penned outside of Germany, for example by Nelly Sachs, Paul Celan, Alfred Gong, and Rose Ausländer, just to name a few.<sup>148</sup> It introduced the notion of “exterritoriality” and of a “deterrioralized language” into the category used to describe a pattern originating in Franz Kafka’s circle of Prague-based writers in the 1920s, but now also recognized in contemporary German Jewish literature.<sup>149</sup> These outside voices soon found company in the voices of those Jews who had returned to Germany (Hilde Domin, Stephan Hermlin, and Berthold Viertel, as well as academic scholars like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer) and continued what Gilman and Zipes call the “tradition of Jewish provocation within German culture” (Gilman/Zipes xxiv). In the immediate postwar era and throughout the 1960s, the provocation largely resided in the mediation of the Holocaust experience of the survivor generation and the constant reminders these authors issued about Germany’s history of Nazi genocide and her moral and ethical responsibilities. With the trauma of the Holocaust still fresh and dictating the terms of their identity as victims, many found themselves brokering the Nazi legacy and challenging the collective German consciousness through their political engagement (Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, Victor Klemperer, Ralph Giordano, Werner Krauss, Werner Nachmann, Heinz Galinski, Marcel Reich-

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<sup>148</sup> Sander Gilman and Jack Zipes, in the introduction to the *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096-1996*, provide a more complete listing of Jewish writers.

<sup>149</sup> Andreas B. Kilcher (133-4) distinguishes between two expressions of Jewish exterritoriality: “eine erste, foermlich physische Form in der Randstaendigkeit grundet auf der geographischen und existentiellen Dislozierung des Schreibstandortes aus Deutschland. . . . Die zweite Form des Schreibens verlegt die Randstaendigkeit foermlich nah innen.” The term “deterrioralized language” refers to Deleuze/Guattari’s definition of a “minor literature” in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*.



Ranicki, Peter Weiss) as authors of fiction or poetry, as academics, journalists, or officials of Jewish representative bodies such as the *Zentralrat der Juden* (Central Council of Jews). By the 1970s then, a differentiation in the Jewish self-positioning becomes noticeable. The focus of attention begins to shift from negotiating immediate Holocaust memory to reflecting on German Jewish identity as survivors twenty or thirty years after the Shoah – a shift marked by the perspective of inherited memory or “post-memory” in the case of the “post-generation.”<sup>150</sup> George Tabori, Edgar Hilsenrath, Jurek Becker, Lea Fleischmann, and Henryk Broder count among the most prominent figures exemplifying this trend when they scrutinize, for example, the legacy of fascism in the Federal Republic.

A preferred analytical category, the generational model serves to distinguish between the survivor generation and following generations of Jewish writers and also resonates in the generational approach to postwar literature in Germany more generally.<sup>151</sup> Despite its popularity in charting literary trends, I believe this model to be somewhat limiting. Positions of writers cannot always unambiguously be classified along generational lines; with the passing of time, they often undergo transformations that both underscore the historical situatedness of their writing and point to ongoing transitions, even in the perspective of a single author. Moreover, Harmut Steinecke (164) notes that “ein wesentliches Zeichen jüdischen Lebens in Deutschland seit den achtziger Jahren ist die rasch wachsende Vielfalt der Auffassungen und Haltungen zur jüdischen Identität und die darauf bezogenen aktuellen Fragen. Diese Meinungsvielfalt prägt

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<sup>150</sup> Y. Michal Bodemann (7), in *A Jewish Family in Germany Today* (2005), speaks of the “community of (Holocaust) memory” from after 1945 and of the new Russian immigrant community as “a group without memory.”

<sup>151</sup> For example, the “Vätergeneration” (father generation), the “Nachgeborenen” (those born after), or the “Enkelgeneration” (grandchildren generation) are popular designations for the first, second, and third postwar generations.

auch die öffentliche Auseinandersetzung [. . .]”.<sup>152</sup> This fact undermines the possibility of generational coherence or closed generational ranks. Rather, I argue, discursive contexts and cultural events prove to be the most effective criteria in the discussion of German Jewish writing. For example, in the 1980s, several political incidents turned into key experiences for the Jewish minority.<sup>153</sup> They left their mark in the expectations of Jews in Germany “to voice their views” and to “be included in public debates and official decision making,” as Sander Gilman and Jack Zipes (Yale xxvii) argue.<sup>154</sup> A quite different model, Carmine Chiellino’s<sup>155</sup> “Topographie der Stimmen” (topography of voices) seems an apt concept to not only capture the literature produced by Germany’s migrant population since the 1960s, but also the multitude of voices within Jewish literature.

Since the 1980s, we’ve been witnessing an increase in Jewish participation in public life and academic debates in a variety of fields (Micha Brumlik, Doron Kiesel, Cilly Kugelman, Julius Schoeps, Robin Ostow, Ruth Beckermann, Michael Wolfssohn, Peter Honigmann, or Ralph Giardono are just a few). This growing political engagement in writing, however, is offset by the emergence of literary fiction about *contemporary* Jewish life, as Rita Bashaw

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<sup>152</sup> “Since the 1980s, a critical feature of Jewish life in Germany concerns the rapid diversification of attitudes toward Jewish identity and of associated current questions. This multitude of perspectives also characterizes public debates . . .”

<sup>153</sup> Examples: the “Bitburg incident”; the “Fassbinder affair”; the screening of the television documentary *Shoah*; and the “historians’ debate.”

<sup>154</sup> Susan Stern’s anthology *Speaking Out*, from 1995, is a compilation of Jewish voices from the 1980s and into the 1990s that testify to the desire to take on a more active role in Germany’s public life.

<sup>155</sup> Chiellino develops the model of the “topography of voices” without giving consideration to the Jewish voice (although he mentions Jurek Becker). He focuses on the writing in German of migrants and refugees.

(275)<sup>156</sup> points out. It complements the already thriving genres of autobiographical and documentary writing, as well as of journalistic and essayistic prose (Rafael Seligmann, Jurek Becker, Katja Behrens, Esther Dischereit, Maxim Biller, or Robert Schindel in Austria). Hartmut Steinecke's (173) discussion of current Jewish writing reminds us that "der heutige Literaturbegriff Zeitungsartikel und –essays ebenso umfasst wie Erzählungen und Romane."<sup>157</sup> Combined, these writers address issues of Jewish religious and cultural identity, gender, diaspora, and displacement through the gamut of aesthetic strategies available to include even satire, humor, cynicism and polemics.<sup>158</sup> This widened and divergent range of topics and styles is testimony to the renewed Jewish cultural movement in Germany and mirrors, I argue, the different stages of a transformative process. Moreover, its richness defies the idea of a monolithic Jewish position on Jewishness assumed by the official and authoritative organs of Jewish leadership throughout the 1980s (Heinz Galinski and Ignatz Bubis) – a position contested in a fierce inner-Jewish debate that Jeffrey Peck (55) describes as "the issue of who speaks for the Jews in Germany."<sup>159</sup>

Without a doubt, the *Wende* (turn) and subsequent German reunification in 1990 stands out as the foremost political event that has left its imprint on Jewish writing. It has, due to its far-reaching consequences, stimulated a revaluation of what Jewishness means in Germany today. Heirs to different pulls, younger writers like Barbara Honigmann, Maxim Biller, Rafael

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<sup>156</sup> Bashaw (275), for example, states that "fiction about *contemporary* life in Germany has existed only since circa 1989," locating its origins in Rafael Seligmann's *Rubinsteins Versteigerung*.

<sup>157</sup> "Today's definition of literature includes journalistic articles and essays as well as stories and novels"

<sup>158</sup> Nolden and Liska, in *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Europe*, from 2008, give a more detailed overview of "common narrative grounds" among contemporary authors.

<sup>159</sup> Stefan Braese (24) mentions the "Zentralrat's de facto monopoly on public expression of Jewish standpoints" and notes that, since 1979, this power has been challenged.

Seligmann, Wladimir Kaminer, Katja Behrens, Oliver Polak, and Lena Gorelik, as well as authors of visual texts like Dani Levy, Alice Brauner, and Uri Schneider explore their Jewishness within the parameters of the new Germany, and thus, I argue, stake out a broader framework for Jewish life in the new Europe. Impelled by the desire to share all facets of the Jewish experience, they demonstrate a continued interest in the memory of the Holocaust, without, however, making it their sole identitarian reference point or following an established protocol of representation. In this vein, Stefan Braese recognizes a “shift in attitude among Jews” (Nolden xxix), who refuse to be burdened by the sense of shame of living in Germany so prominent in the survivor generation. While being “firmly embedded in German culture,” (Bodemann JF 6), they now self-confidently display their Jewishness in a variety of ways. Not surprisingly then, this literature focuses on Jewish life in Germany as it unfolds in the present. In taking its subject matter from everyday encounters between Germans and Jews, it reframes the premise of such interactions and, from the Jewish perspective, renders the experience intelligible. Concerned with the mundane and ordinary, it demystifies a relationship that has suffered under the perceived impossibility of being imagined in terms of the commonplace and of the “here and now.” Further, I argue, each author resorts to unique forms of expression and artistic practice to make his very own contribution to a multidimensional picture of Jewishness. The future-oriented undercurrent I observe in these works characterizes the outlook of a younger crop of writers and filmmakers, who pursue the seemingly more urgent project of coming to terms with the present rather than the coming to terms with the past. Given the richness of the prose Jews have been producing in Germany since 1945 and the challenges in classifying this body of texts, I second Andreas Kilcher’s (Metzler XIX) understanding of the role of literary analysis. Warning us against any totalizing or reductive definition of German

Jewish writing, he argues that “deutsch-jüdische Literatur ist in diesem präzisen Sinne eine historisch und politisch-geographisch deterritoralisierte Literatur, eine Literatur zwischen Ereignissen, Nationen und Politiken,”<sup>160</sup> and calls on us to pay attention to the “selbstreflektive Standortbestimmungen singulärer Schreibakte”<sup>161</sup> (Kilcher xv).

### 3.2 THE VOICE OF A POSTCOLONIAL WRITER: MAXIM BILLER AND THE CHALLENGE OF REPRESENTATION

Wer weggeht, will so tun, als habe es ihn vorher nicht gegeben . . . Ich erinnerte mich daran, wie ich vor zwei Jahren beschlossen hatte, in Deutschland zu bleiben und nicht mehr von Israel zu träumen . . . Ich musste über das schreiben, was hier war, und das würde weh tun.<sup>162</sup> (Biller GJ 64)

Maxim Biller provocatively declared his project as a Jewish writer in Germany in this autobiographical statement. The threatening undertone of his avowal strikes a confrontational chord and promises to make for some uncomfortable reading material for his German audience. Biller’s sense of obligation to expose and scrutinize life in Germany with the intent to employ affect – to the point of hurt – in reaching his audience hardly comes as a surprise. After all, the Jewish voice after 1945 stands in a long “tradition of Jewish provocation within German culture” (Gilman/Zipes) and is a reminder of a past and historical guilt many Germans would rather relegate to the archives of history or see resolved in a state of normalization. As tensions

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<sup>160</sup> “In this precise sense, German-Jewish literature is a historically and polito-geographically deterritorialized literature, a literature between events, nations, and politics”

<sup>161</sup> “the self-reflective positioning of individual acts of writing”

<sup>162</sup> “The one leaving acts as if he hadn’t been there before . . . I remembered how I had decided two years ago to stay in Germany and to no longer dream of Israel . . . I had to write about what was going on here, and that would hurt.”

and unease are thus built into the German-Jewish relationship, Biller's Germany seems an appropriate target for his mission. Yet, it does come as a surprise that despite his sting, Germans are fascinated with Biller and his bold voice. Even more astonishing is the fact that Biller's project would be just as upsetting and hurtful to his Jewish readers. The pain he causes can be traced in the reception of his work and above all in the loud criticism expressed by official organs of the Jewish Community. Accused of anti-Semitism and Jewish self-hatred, the *Nestbeschmutzer* Biller – carefully “cultivating the image of enfant terrible” as Feldman (132) points out – clearly stands out as a contentious author who cannot be trusted to represent a tacitly assumed, united Jewish position. Without reaching, we may conclude that his writing transgresses boundaries, violates the established etiquette<sup>163</sup> governing German-Jewish relations, and is felt as a challenge to non-Jewish Germans and Jews alike.

As Biller's reputation vacillates from “enfant terrible,” to taboo-breaker, to radical proponent of Enlightenment ideals, equaling the fascination and condemnation with which his work is met, he counts among the most acclaimed and widely read authors representative of the youngest generation of writers. Born in Prague in 1960 to Russian Jewish immigrants, he moved with his family to the Federal Republic of Germany when he was ten, settling in Hamburg. After studying literature and journalism, he first made himself a name as author of the *Tempo* magazine column *100 Zeilen Hass* (100 Lines of Hatred). The architect of a new style of German Jewish writing and frequently compared to American Jewish authors Saul

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<sup>163</sup> I'm using the term “etiquette” to mean the code of conduct informed by the norms and conventions accepted by a society.

Bellow and Philip Roth<sup>164</sup>, he created an array of literary vignettes that thrive on “wohl inszenierte Tabubrüche”<sup>165</sup> and that are meant to break up the supposed “‘Harmoniediktatur’ in Deutschland”<sup>166</sup> (Schruff 66). The vignettes have been published in numerous collections, including *Die Tempojahre* (1991), *Wenn ich einmal reich und tot bin* (1990), *Land der Väter und Verräter* (1994), *Moralische Geschichten* (2005), *Liebe heute* (2007), and *Bernsteintage* (2004). Most of his stories are characterized by a decidedly Jewish subject matter and are often informed by Biller’s personal experience as Jew in Germany, their overarching theme reflected in the following autobiographic statements (from the 1980s and from 1995, respectively): “mich interessierte nur, dass ich Jude war”<sup>167</sup> (Biller GJ 19); and, from his article *Goodbye Columbus*, “dass man als Jude in Deutschland nicht leben und schreiben sollte, ist logischerweise gleich der erste und triftigste Grund dafür, warum man ausgerechnet als Jude in Deutschland besonders bewusst jüdisch lebt und schreibt”<sup>168</sup> (Schruff 67).

The 2009 publication of his “Selbstportrait” (self portrait) *Der gebrauchte Jude* documents Biller’s personal history and motivation to reflect in his work on what it means to be Jewish, and on the part Jews play in integrating their individual biographies into the reality of everyday life in Germany. Importantly, he defines his Jewishness “aus dem Gegensatz zum Nichtjüdischen, zum Antisemitismus, zu Nazis”<sup>169</sup> (Biller GJ 19). He thus recognizes a dialectic

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<sup>164</sup> Biller (GJ 20) himself acknowledges Roth’s influence on him, for example, in this autobiographical statement: “Ueber Juden redete aber keener – zumindest nicht ueber die, die lebten. Dann entdeckte ich Philip Roth.”

<sup>165</sup> “deliberately staged breaking of taboos”

<sup>166</sup> “the dictatorship of harmony”

<sup>167</sup> “I was only interested in being Jewish”

<sup>168</sup> “and that as a Jew one should neither live nor write in Germany is logically the foremost reason why as a Jew in Germany one should live and write in a decidedly Jewish manner”

<sup>169</sup> “in its opposition to non-Jewishness, to anti-Semitism, to Nazism”

that also defines Germanness when he questions “wüssten sie ohne mich, wer sie sind?”<sup>170</sup> (Biller GJ 163). Attributing to himself the quality of being “gebraucht,” in its double sense of being a needed but also used (perhaps even abused) commodity, Biller sets himself the task of making this dialectic transparent for his readers. As a result, he produces a uniquely German-Jewish perspective that introduces a counter-reality to the reality perceived and constructed by the non-Jewish majority. His project of “schreiben, was hier war”<sup>171</sup> fuses fact and fiction in a liberal mix of real and invented characters to conjecture an alternative interpretation of official or dominant cultural narratives. He makes it clear that history matters, and his statement spells out the importance of the past for the present, for the individual, and, by extension, for society as a whole. This insight in itself is nothing particularly novel, but I argue that the scope of his historical framework and the idioms in which he writes are new indeed. Biller’s “enlightenment project” harkens back to a forgotten tradition and circumnavigates the normative and perhaps myopic focus on the Holocaust for Jewish identity. His work stands in the tradition of the centuries-old discourse of Jewish emancipation and its investment in the Orientalist imagination. In citing tropes and imagery from this historical discourse and injecting them into the German Jewish discourse of today, he reframes and opens up the debate to integrate different kinds of experience. Consequently, he moves beyond the experience claimed by the survivor generation and those “petrified victims” (Remmler 3), who have defined Jewishness in Germany in the postwar decades.

The widened horizon against which Biller reads Jewishness in Germany transcends the limits set by Holocaust decorum. It references cultural idioms – i.e., ways of thinking about the

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<sup>170</sup> “would they know who they are without me?”

<sup>171</sup> “writing what was going on here”



present as well the historical materiality of Jewish life in Germany – that distract from the Holocaust victim dominating our understanding of Jewishness throughout the 1980s. These idioms reference aspects of a Jewish experience that hitherto couldn't be fully considered or could only be rehearsed within the dominant paradigm through which German Jewish discourse evolved after 1945. This is where I locate the volatility of Biller's writing and the novel approach he brings to the notion of postmemory: he circumvents the limits Holocaust discourse imposed on representations of Jewishness when he incorporates other kinds of memory of the Jewish past into contemporary contexts, thus breaking from a discursive pattern that may no longer align with the reality experienced by Jews in Germany today.

Considering Biller's choice of representational style, this chapter probes into his method of reworking notions of Orientalized Jewishness and discusses how they serve as an anchoring point in much of his work. His texts become the vehicle to transport remnants of Orientalist discourse, "Versatzstücke," into current time, which allow past patterns to intervene in the present. In fact, Biller seems to respond to moral philosopher Susan Neiman's exhortation from 1994 that there is "yet ... another task for German Jews, and one hardly less important: the confrontation with our own past, a confrontation that would bracket those fatal twelve years and come to terms with others" (Gilman/Remmler 264). I wish to show how Biller, throughout his work, interweaves aspects of the contested Jewish ghetto past, of the Holocaust, and of the present to produce a richly textured tapestry of the Jewish experience that makes a future possible. In a first step, I will discuss what I call his manifesto and what he sets out to achieve using the example of one of his earlier pieces of writing. In a second step, I will examine the textual relationship between some of Biller's stories and the Chassidic story; lastly, I'll address

Biller's appropriation of the ghetto story as an aesthetic strategy against Jewish invisibility and isolation.

### 3.2.1 The Location of Biller's Language of Provocation

Credited for energizing contemporary German Jewish literature, Maxim Biller has effectively renegotiated the imaginary possibilities of what it means to be Jewish in Germany since he entered the marketplace of public discourse in the late 1980s.<sup>172</sup> One of Biller's earliest pieces of writing, "Die Nachmann-Juden,"<sup>173</sup> published in the collection of stories *Die Tempojahre*,<sup>174</sup> (171) from 1991, and composed in the journalistic idiom of an opinion column, is instructive. It further expands and explains Biller's manifesto of "schreiben was hier war"<sup>175</sup> in formulating a detailed critique of the "deutsche Nachkriegs-Juden" (the German postwar Jews), and hammering out what's at issue. Written with merciless sarcasm and bereft of the respect generally owed to his fellow-Jews in Germany, he describes and directly speaks to a generation of "Zyniker und Gangster, Shylocks und Ungeheuer"<sup>176</sup> (Biller TJ 171) lacking any of the qualities that inform the positive survivor stereotype and the image of the postwar Jew circulating in Germany:

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<sup>172</sup> Rafael Seligmann believes that "Jewish literature in postwar Germany has suffered greatly from philo-Semitism . . . because it has been 'sterilized of hate'" (Stern 20).

<sup>173</sup> Walter Nachmann (1925-1988) was a prominent public figure as chairman of the "Jüdische Gemeinde" in Karlsruhe since 1961 and as head of the "Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland" from 1969 until his death in 1988. He is remembered for his politics of rapprochement between the political institutions of the FRG and Jewish organizations – an approach that earned him much praise, but also criticism for his allegedly too conciliatory attitude towards Germany.

<sup>174</sup> Biller's regular journalistic contributions to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* make up the story collection in *Die Tempojahre*.

<sup>175</sup> "writing what was going on here"

<sup>176</sup> "cynics, gangster, shylocks and monsters"

So richtig klug sind sie nicht. Und auch nicht kreativ und schon gar nicht gebildet. Es gibt keine Kosmopoliten unter ihnen, keine Mäzene, keine Koryphäen. Deutsche Nachkriegsjuden haben selten Format. Sie kommen aus Polen, Rumänien und Russland. Sie haben das Nazi-Massaker halbwegs unbeschadet überstanden. Aber die Shtetl und Arbeiterviertel, in denen sie grossgeworden sind, haben sie für immer geprägt. Die Überlebenden sollten, sagen Sie, eine KZ-Neurose haben? Glaube ich nicht. . . . Diese Wirtschaftswunder-Juden muten wie Neandertaler mit australischen Pässen an: Einerseits dürfte es sie im Prinzip gar nicht mehr geben, andererseits stammen sie alle irgendwie von einer Bande von Gesetzlosen ab. . . . Und nur solche nekrophilen Monster wie sie – ausgestattet mit Nerven aus Stahl und einem ewigen Leben – konnten unsere Eltern werden.<sup>177</sup> (TJ 171)

In a first strike, Biller lashes out against the so-called first generation in stripping it of its presumed moral, intellectual, and cultural superiority. He breaks down the stereotype of the “good Jew” and morally upright victim and survivor only to reduce these Jews to a horde of opportunistic outlaws characterized by “Geiz, unbedarften Grössenwahn und kleinkariertes Unternehmens-Denken”<sup>178</sup> (TJ 171) – features they reproduce in their offspring, perpetuating the “Borniertheit und Selbstverliebtheit,” the closed-mindedness and self-infatuation of the parent generation (TJ 174).<sup>179</sup> In a second strike, Biller blames this generation of “Gemeinde-Juden,” community Jews, for their choice of “very petit bourgeois” (TJ 171) lifestyle habits and a mentality he believes cements the walls of their self-inflicted, postwar ghetto. Determined to

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<sup>177</sup> They’re neither really smart, nor are they creative, least of all educated. There are no cosmopolitans among them, no patrons, no geniuses. German postwar Jews rarely have stature. They come from Poland, Romania, and Russia. They survived the Nazi massacre almost unscathed. But the shtetl and working-class neighborhoods where they grew up have left their imprint on them. You say, the survivors are supposed to have a concentration camp neurosis? I don’t buy that . . . . These economic miracle-Jews seem like Neanderthals with Australian passports: in principle, they shouldn’t exist any more, but they’re all the descendants of a pack of outlaws. . . . And only such necrophilic monsters like them – equipped with nerves of steel and eternal life – could become our parents.

<sup>178</sup> “avarice, simple-minded megalomania, and a petty entrepreneurial spirit”

<sup>179</sup> Susan Stern (20), in *Speaking Out*, observes that “philo-Semites, driven by feelings of guilt, insist on viewing the Jews as morally superior beings” – a challenge to Jews who “feel they have to live up to the elevated image.”

emphasize the dangers and pitfalls of this voluntary ghetto existence, he suggests a telling analogy with the Jewish ghetto past: “Es ist das reinste 19. Jahrhundert”<sup>180</sup> (TJ 172). He further laments that despite his constitutional rights to full legal citizenship and parity today, “der Nachmannsche Nachkriegsjude will nicht dazugehören . . . . Er grenzt sich ab. Er hat seine eigenen Cafes und Korsos, seine eigenen Boutiquen und Freizeit-Riten, seinen ureigensten Werte-Kanon, der streng dualistisch in jüdisch und gojisch trennt”<sup>181</sup> (TJ 172). While Biller pushes neither for assimilation, nor mixed marriages “wo zwei Juden sich lieben”<sup>182</sup> (TJ 172), nor for the “Auflösung unserer Post-Holocaust-GmbH,”<sup>183</sup> he mandates “einen Sinn, ein Gefühl für die nichtjüdische Realität, in der wir leben. Denn aus ihr – genauso wie aus unserer Geschichte – lernen wir. . . . Soll die universale Suche nach Wahrheit und Spass etwa ohne uns weitergehen?”<sup>184</sup> (TJ 172).

It is important to remember the date of the publication of this text. It falls at the tail end of an era where Jews in Germany participated in the public arena predominantly through the voice of their official bodies of representation, i.e. the “Gemeinde,” the Jewish Community, or the “Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland,” the Central Council of Jews, rather than through their personal active engagement with the dominant gentile culture.<sup>185</sup> Worried about being “potential victims” of lingering anti-Semitic sentiments, as Susan Stern (17) describes, Jews

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<sup>180</sup> “it is the outright 19<sup>th</sup> century”

<sup>181</sup> “the Nachmann postwar Jew does not want to belong . . . . He keeps a distance. He has his own cafes and processions, his own boutiques and pastimes, his very own canon of values, which are strictly divided into Jewish and gentile”

<sup>182</sup> “where two Jews are in love with each other”

<sup>183</sup> “dissolution of our post-Holocaust Ltd.”

<sup>184</sup> “a sense for the non-Jewish real world in which we live, because we can learn from it much in the same way as from our history. . . . Should the universal search for truth and fun continue without us?”

<sup>185</sup> In fact, Biller (TJ 173) blames the “Gemeinde” and its members for raising the “Golf GTI-Hilton-Bar-mizva-Herde” and for keeping it in line.

kept a low profile and stayed out of the public's eye in the postwar decades. However, the publication date also coincides with the very moment when several public events in Germany encourage Jews to abandon their invisibility, with the goal to insert the Jewish perspective. The "Historikerstreit," or historians' debate from 1986, followed by the "normalization" debate, were particularly contentious. They put into question the exclusivity of the Jewish victim status – a threat to Biller's "Post-Holocaust-GmbH," to which he responds from the point of view of the younger generation. Faulting Jews for exploiting the "schlechten Gewissen der Deutschen"<sup>186</sup> in that they "hemmungslos melken [sie] die Holocaust-Kuh"<sup>187</sup> while being immersed in their "Appeasement-Politik" (politics of appeasement), Biller sets up a relationship between the dominant culture and the Jewish minority that is corrupted by the lack of moral principles and honesty on both sides. Not so subtly, he indicts Jews for buying into German philo-Semitic sentiments of guilt. As a result of such feelings, he believes, Jews are trapped in a position of "morally superior beings" (Stern 20) – a position that has its downsides: it prevents Jews from speaking out or giving "expression to their anger at the harm done to them in the past by the Germans for fear of disappointing their self-appointed 'friends'" (Stern 20).

In the effort to solicit support for his viewpoint from his fellow-Jews and shake them out of their own complacency, Biller paints a dreadful picture of his peers. He even suggests a strong likeness between the postwar Jew with his "verkorkste Ghetto-und-Geld-Dumpfheit"<sup>188</sup> (TJ 173) and the mindset of his ghetto ancestors from the shtetl. The summoning of the Oriental Jew with the ghetto mentality to make his case is a powerful tool to force the postwar Jew out of his problematic comfort zone. The stereotype serves as a poetic marker for the seemingly

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<sup>186</sup> "the bad conscience of the Germans"

<sup>187</sup> "unrestrained they milk the Holocaust-cow"

<sup>188</sup> "screwed-up ghetto and money dullness"

unenlightened and unemancipated existence he leads. An uncanny reminder of an extinguished past lifestyle and culture, this anachronistic figure appears to have lost none of its deterring features for Biller. In fact, it has relevance for the present, as it embodies the negative traits and provincialism Biller reads into his peers and their mode of coping with a German postwar reality. In blurring the signs of distinction between the postwar Jew and the ghetto Jew and using the language of the discourse of modernity, Biller installs a mechanism of similarity that can only be understood in terms of provocation.

Yet in a moment of unusual optimism, Biller (TJ 174) sees a way for Jews to tear through the walls of the ghetto and grow beyond their self-imposed limitations. Biller's rhetorical gesture calls for active involvement in the full range of German cultural discourses, placing him squarely within the tradition of enlightenment ideals:

Das Ghetto – egal wie sicher und luxuriös es darin zugeht – kennt *per definitionem* immer nur eins: den Selbsterhaltungstrieb. Eine solche ängstlich-egoistische Haltung führt aber automatisch in seelischen und geistigen Provinzialismus. Das darf die Jugend nicht dulden. Also raus aus der Judengasse, Freunde. Hinein in den fantastischen Trubel der Kunst, der Politik und des wissenschaftlichen Diskurses. Da draussen ist das Leben. Wir können von den anderen noch immer eine Menge lernen.<sup>189</sup>

While the text is a scathing indictment of the state of German Jewry in the late 1980s and is bound to offend all factions involved, Biller appears to stage himself as a visionary, with the insight to recognize the problems, and as an advocate of change. His answer to what he considers an untenable condition of silence and compliance with the status quo is found in the urgent appeal, at the very end of the text, to leave the ghetto behind and play a part in the

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<sup>189</sup> By definition, the ghetto – no matter how safe and extravagant – knows only one law: the drive of self-preservation. However, such a selfish and fearful attitude necessarily will lead to spiritual and mental provincialism. The young mustn't tolerate that. Therefore, my friends, leave the ghetto and embrace the fantastic bustle of the arts, politics and of scientific discourse. Life takes place out there, and we can still learn a lot from the others.

political and cultural processes of the world around. Using his personal platform as a writer and public figure, then, Biller becomes part of that process. He intends to bring about a change in attitude among his younger peers that requires some navel-gazing beyond the immersion in public discourses. Through his own body of work, he provides a forum for social critique and commentary to challenge those restrictive conventions that regulate how the German-Jewish relationship is lived and represented five decades into the postwar era. My discussion explores Biller's translation of his political project into fiction. It examines how this artistic rendering of the manifesto shapes the new idiom of Jewish writing in German. Rather than drawing on his longer and often-quoted novels, I'm concentrating on a selection of his shorter stories. My analysis posits the importance of a network of Jewish literary traditions in Biller and shows that, by appropriating their function and structure, he recasts the German Jewish relationship at the turn of the millennium.

### **3.2.2 Biller's Fall of the Ghetto Walls**

Concerned with an aesthetic able to render justice to their voices, Jewish writers since the 1980s have been experimenting with different genres. The family saga, the memoir, the society novel, the bildungsroman, the detective and the historical novel are among those Nolden and Liska (xxiii) identify in Jewish writing in Europe – none of which, however, sufficiently captures the artistic emancipation Biller reaches in his work. Left largely unaddressed so far, the originality of Biller's prose found in the provocative and unconventional thematization of the Jewish subject matter in the Berlin Republic is informed by its affiliation with earlier Jewish literary traditions. The "Chassidic story" and "ghetto fiction", I contend, are two such traditions from which Biller borrows to invent his own contemporary narrative. This fusion brings into

contamination different kinds of memory and modes of Jewish self-representations from discrete moments of Jewish history, usually narrated in separate contexts. In recovering aspects of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Jewish literary archive and thus drawing from two decidedly Jewish-themed genres, Biller may be said to perform the remedial or reconstructive work of a postcolonial writer looking to recover a lost culture.<sup>190</sup> But, quite differently from this common agenda of postcolonial writers, Biller develops a postcolonial project of his own brand when using the archive to force unexpected associations between unlikely situations and characters from disjointed moments in time. In doing so, Biller actually shatters any prospect of reconstructing a self-contained Jewish world – as is the case in ghetto fiction – let alone a belief system once viewed to have the answer to the ills of the modern Jewish existence – as is the case in the stories of the Chassidim. Rather, making use of these genres and recombining them in the present context, he summarily voids those frames of reference that give meaning to Jewish self-understanding. He not only invalidates the postwar Jew's choice to withdraw in his ghetto, but also negates traditional Jewish life and the literary traditions that gave it meaning.

The 2005 story collection entitled *Moralische Geschichten* exemplifies the ties Biller forges with a particular form of the ghetto story, i.e. with Chassidic literature. It features an assemblage of realist vignettes, written over the course of twenty years of Biller's career. Before I analyze selected stories, I will sketch the tradition's origins and contours. Chassidic literature dates back to the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> / 20<sup>th</sup> century and refers to an oral story telling tradition among the Chassidim of Eastern Europe<sup>191</sup>, which Martin Buber (1878 – 1965) popularized as printed

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<sup>190</sup> Neil Lazarus in *The Postcolonial Unconscious* describes the task of the postcolonial writer of “counter-representation” to unwrite the colonial archive.

<sup>191</sup> Ludewig (123) and Aschheim (121-137) each offer a review of Chassidism.



document.<sup>192</sup> Buber, born in 1878 in Vienna into a wealthy Jewish family, spent much of his childhood, after the separation of his parents, with his grandparents in Lemberg (at the time part of the Austrian Empire), where he attended the Gymnasium. Under the influence of his grandfather – a researcher and collector in the field of Chassidic literature – Buber became familiar with the traditions of the Chassidim. He developed a keen interest in their religious practices that would eventually determine much of his philosophical thought and become the centerpiece of his life’s work. His breakout volume *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman*, from 1906, features an array of stories he had translated, arranged, and edited, and is followed by a sequel entitled *Legende des Baalschem*, in 1907. From the 1920s and on through the 1940s, he published several more volumes.

Contrary to Theodor Herzl’s contemporaneous project of political nationalism in the shape of Zionism,<sup>193</sup> Buber envisioned a different kind of Jewish movement in fostering the spiritual and cultural renewal of Jewry that would give new meaning to modernizing German Jewish identity: Chassidism filling in where organized religion had failed, and creating a venue by which to achieve the reconciliation of the Jewish collective split between the provincial

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<sup>192</sup> Aschheim (121) reminds us of Chassidim’s reputation among Western Jews in Buber’s day: “a live reminder from Eastern Europe of the demonic powers of mysticism and unreason” and “lacking both philosophical and historical integrity, it was not worthy of separate consideration as an autonomous, coherent, and valid Jewish tradition.” Chasidism thus stands in sharp contrast to Buber’s own Western Jewish background.

<sup>193</sup> Martin Buber first joined Herzl’s Zionist movement around 1900, but soon began to look for alternatives to political Zionism. He had a productive career as editor and translator of Chassidic tales, as editor in Frankfurt, and, together with Salman Schocken, as founder of the journal *Der Jude* (a first venue to publish some of the Chassidic stories he collected). He authored the book *I and Thou* (1923) and translated the bible in close collaboration with Franz Rosenzweig, a project begun in 1925 and which he continued until Rosenzweig’s death in 1929.

Eastern shtetls and the cosmopolitan centers of the West.<sup>194</sup> Cultivating a “kulturzionistischen Begriff der Literatur”<sup>195</sup> (Billen 96), he embarked on the task of preserving a rich Eastern Jewish heritage of oral story telling for his peers and future generations as a means to counter the “als Entmythisierung gefassten Krise des westlichen Judentums”<sup>196</sup> (Billen 96) and to make available to a wide readership the models of “real humanity” and “genuine community and genuine leadership” he believed these stories communicate (Moore 52).

Structurally and functionally, the stories are “offene, noch nicht zu Ende geführte Geschichten”<sup>197</sup> (Billen 99), with an anecdotal nature that Buber elevates to “‘zu einer gültigen Literaturform’ . . . , die er als ‘legendäre Anekdote’ bezeichnet”<sup>198</sup> (Billen 98). Lacking the narrative arc or character development so important in novelistic writing, these stories reduce and condense their message to a minimum and within a few lines. True to the aphoristic form, they are brief and self-contained units constructed around moral precepts, typically carried by the voice of the Chassidic leaders, the “zaddik,” who narrate exemplary events, everyday encounters, or deeds from their interactions with their community. Morality is transmitted via enigmatic, often encrypted wisdoms about daily worries in life, and thus via the pronounced mystification<sup>199</sup> of worldly matters. Unconcerned with the teaching of knowledge itself, Donald Moore (31) suggests, the stories “do not want to offer man the solution of the world mystery,

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<sup>194</sup> Josef Billen (96), in the *Metzler Lexikon der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur*, gives a concise discussion of Buber’s life and work. Paul Mendes-Flohr, in *The Jew in the Modern World*, is another source for quotes from Buber and for a brief summary of Buber’s work. A further source is Donald J. Moore’s monograph from 1996, with the title *Martin Buber*. I draw from all of them for my summary of Buber’s work.

<sup>195</sup> “cultural Zionist notion of literature”

<sup>196</sup> “crisis of de-mythification understood to plague Western Judaism”

<sup>197</sup> “open, incomplete stories”

<sup>198</sup> “a legitimate literary genre . . . , which he terms ‘legendary anecdote’”

<sup>199</sup> For Buber, mysticism as articulated in the Chassidic story provides all the answers to man’s existential and metaphysical questions.

but to equip him to live from the strength of the mystery” – a charge of particular importance to Buber’s Jewish readership at a time marked by the increasing marginalization of Jews and overshadowed by the existential threat they felt with the rise of Nazism. In a sense, then, the Chassidim’s passionate championship of the mystical in line with Chassidic teachings, i.e. the riddle-like encoding of all sorts of troubles Jews encounter in earthly life filtered through and mediated by the wonder rabbi<sup>200</sup> leader, is the key to conveying wisdoms that both give purpose to daily struggles and provide spiritual sustenance to Jewry in the here and now.

When Biller compiles the collection of his own anecdotal stories, he invokes the premise and structure of Chassidic storytelling. His stories, too, follow the model of the short form typical of Buber’s anecdotes, and subscribe to a spirit of moralism, as evident in the programmatic title, *Moralische Geschichten*, of the volume.<sup>201</sup> The introduction inside the book jacket promises that “die ganz grossen Themen [werden] angeschlagen, dann aber rasant auf ein scheinbar profanes Alltagsformat gebracht . . . [und] führen dabei zu den überraschendsten und befreiendsten Erkenntnissen”<sup>202</sup> (MG). If for Buber the vicissitudes of everyday life constitute the core of the Chassidic story, or rather, of the legendary anecdote, to then guide man through the larger metaphysical questions of his existence, Biller addresses the pressing questions of Jewish life in Germany in his own time. Paralleling Buber’s work, he then negotiates surrounding issues at the level of the mundane and the individual and emplotted in realist scenarios. Thus, both Buber and Biller take everyday reality as the focal point in their stories only to take a look behind the screen and at what we know. However, their gaze produces quite

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<sup>200</sup> The Chassidim’s spiritual leaders are called “zaddik” or also “wonder rabbi.”

<sup>201</sup> Reveiwiers have termed these stories “Miniaturen,” “Kurz- und Kürzestgeschichten” (Der Spiegel)

<sup>202</sup> “the most complex topics are brought up, but are quickly reduced to the level of the ordinary and commonplace . . . [and] leading to the most surprising and liberating insights”

different results. Whereas Buber's look reveals what Josef Billen (Metzler 96) calls "transzendente Sinnzusammenhänge"<sup>203</sup> that offer an alternative to the religious dogmatism Buber faults for Judaism's crisis,<sup>204</sup> Biller's gaze discredits all forms of dogmatism without, however, offering any transcendental explanations as alternative.

The interplay between minor, everyday worries and concerns of greater weight are reflected in the choice of titles for the stories. On one hand, themes central to the present Jewish experience find expression in titles such as "Baader," "Gysi," "Walser," "Mahnmal" (memorial), "Dr. Mengele," "Vergeltung" (retribution), "Hitler," "Arafat," "Gas," "Bitburg," "Grass," "Goebbels," "Jud Süß," "Moral," "Assimilation," "Selbsthass" (self-hatred), "Paradigmenwechsel" (paradigm shift), and "Trauma," amongst many others. On the other hand, the ordinariness, if not banality of topics is illustrated in titles like "Der Liebesbrief" (the love letter), "Fussball" (soccer), "Der Zahnarzt" (the dentist), "Der Kuss" (the kiss), "PMS," "Petersilie" (parsley), "Eier" (eggs), "Glücksrad" (wheel of fortune), "Bahncard," "Der Clown," "Geld" (money), or "Die Tochter" (the daughter) – no topic too trivial to be included. Similarly, Buber's stories carry equally short titles and are governed by notions of the commonplace: "Hide-and-Seek," "The Want," "The Cow," "The Baal Shem's Messenger," "Barter," "The Spoon," "The Coat," "Testimony," "Denunciation," "Differences," "The One Thing," "Envy," "Day After Day," "Drudgery," and "The Ladder," to name just a few. By contrast, other titles suggest greater depth and philosophical weight: "When It Is Good to Deny the Existence of God"; "The Place of Man"; or "The Phylacteries of God."

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<sup>203</sup> "transcendental explanations"

<sup>204</sup> Donald J. Moore (40-1) speaks of Buber's challenge to "institutional religion" and his understanding of the "great danger of religion". Moore argues that Buber objects the rigidity and "dominance of the law" characterizing Judaism.

Despite their similarities, Buber and Biller's stories pursue quite different goals. If Buber values the transmission of wisdoms by way of mystifying all earthly matters and elevates the *zaddik*<sup>205</sup> – the spiritual leader of the Chassidic community and “teacher of world meaning” (Moore 51) – as the embodiment and facilitator of this process of mystification, Biller denies the *zaddik* his redemptive role. But, that raises the question of how he transmits his own morality? After all, his stories fuse a genre belonging to and representative of quintessential Oriental Jewishness with contemporary cultural discourses and concerns so different from those of his literary precursor. What is his mystifying strategy about? Deprived of the very beliefs that underpin the Chassidic story – Biller nowhere suggests that he's a believing Jew, let alone a follower of Chassidism – where does this mixing of literary traditions take him and what kind of answers does he offer to his contemporaries?

One way to approach Biller's puzzling choice of cross-referencing Buber and their common claims to morality is with Walter Benjamin's concept of the “Erzählung,” i.e., the story. This philosopher takes the personal experience of the storyteller's real life as its source of wisdoms: “(Ganz davon abgesehen, dass ein Mensch einem Rat sich nur soweit öffnet, als er seine Lage zu Wort kommen lässt.) Rat, in den Stoff gelebten Lebens eingewebt, ist Weisheit”<sup>206</sup> (Benjamin 442). Unlike other literary forms such as the novel, Benjamin (445) argues, the story forgoes any explanations in that “es ist nämlich schon die halbe Kunst des Erzählens, eine Geschichte, indem man sie wiedergibt, von Erklärungen freizuhalten,”<sup>207</sup> thus

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<sup>205</sup> Donald Moore (51) explains the *zaddik* and his role in more detail when he describes him as “the perfected man” who facilitates the transfiguration of “the ordinary life of people” that will lead to salvation.

<sup>206</sup> “(Besides, a person is only open to advice if it reflects his personal concerns.) Advice, woven into the fabric of life, is wisdom.”

<sup>207</sup> “Much of the art of storytelling means keeping the narration free of explanations”

empowering the reader to draw conclusions and make connections as it is “ihm freigestellt, sich die Sache zurechtzulegen, wie er sie versteht.”<sup>208</sup> Consequently, the story relies on its openness for the production of meaning for its wisdoms are concealed in the creative emplotment of everyday reality.<sup>209</sup> Besides challenging the reader’s cognitive processing skills, this important feature of the story serves to disrupt patterns of thought and meaning-making he has come to accept. Through its structure, the possibility to find definitive and absolute answers to the issues presented in the story is undermined. Thus, Benjamin’s notion of the story can redeem Biller, whose stories might otherwise seem incomprehensible and be easily dismissed for their lack of causal logic and clarity.

In much the same way as Buber’s anecdotal stories are characterized by this structure of openness and a message often undefined and obscured, Biller’s stories assume the *gestalt* of the genre. They, too, enlist the reader in the meaning-making of experience from his lived reality, which he encodes in his story. In this sense, the Chassidic story provides a suitable model for Biller in his own search for a mode of writing “was hier war” and to address those real-life events and issues he must confront in his life as Jew in Germany. In his self-portrait, for example, Biller mentions the resolve early on in his career to write about “Wirklichkeit,” the everyday reality, at times through the lens of humor and irony, at others, through those of anger and hatred. Adopting a Jewish-themed agenda – “es würde um Juden gehen und um nichts als Juden,”<sup>210</sup> Biller (GJ 37) declares – he’s unafraid to take on public discourses, contentious

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<sup>208</sup> “he is free to interpret the story as he understands it”

<sup>209</sup> Benjamin considers Johann Peter Hebel an exemplary narrator, his stories from the *Kalendergeschichten* in *Der Rheinische Hausfreund* a source of advice and wisdoms for the readers.

<sup>210</sup> “this would be about Jews, nothing but Jews”

political figures, non-Jews and Jews alike, taboos, myths, and sensitive questions about being Jewish in Germany.

Aimed at “die Wirklichkeit zu akzeptieren und zu verändern”<sup>211</sup> (Biller GJ 140), Biller makes an important point with his claims to accepting and altering reality through writing. His artistic vision is akin to the function of the Chassidic story and its adaptation of lived reality through encryption. He, too, is committed to challenging our perceptions of the world when presenting his readers with puzzling renderings of a world they thought they knew. While these stories lend themselves to be read in their composite, due to their joint formal qualities and thematic focus, I will use two of them as examples to flesh out Biller’s “wisdoms” and critique of lived reality at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The story “Hitler” not only illustrates Benjamin’s definition of the story, but also Biller’s masterful fusion of Orientalized Jewishness and recent German Nazi history in the tradition of the Chassidic story. Without a doubt, he pushes the boundaries of representation into uncharted terrain. Biller’s character Feilchenduft, bearing the stereotypical name of the shtetl Jew, dreams of being Hitler at the Landsberg Fortress in 1924. Waking up from a nap not in the body of Hitler but in that of a “polnischen Wunderrabbi mit Bart, Pajes, Pelzhut und Goldkaftan”<sup>212</sup> (Biller 40), Feilchenduft – unaware of his transformation and by now the embodiment of three different people – “setzte, frisch und ausgeruht, die Arbeit an ‘Mein Kampf’ fort”<sup>213</sup> (Biller 40). When Rudolf Hess opens the door a while later to ask the *Führer* he expects to be in the room to dictate him a new chapter of his work-in-progress, he “sieht den mit

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<sup>211</sup> “to accept reality and change it”

<sup>212</sup> “Polish wonder rabbi with beard, pajez, fur cap, and gold kaftan”

<sup>213</sup> “continued, fresh and rested, his work on *Mein Kampf*”

seinem Oberkörper rhythmisch vorwärts und rückwärts wippenden Zaddik verblüfft an,”<sup>214</sup> and apologizes for having seemingly mistaken the door. However, after Hess returns shortly thereafter and reopens the door, “der Wunderrabbi hatte sich in Feilchenduft verwandelt, der Hess fragte, ob er an einer Kollektion Damenunterwäsche interessiert sei.”<sup>215</sup>

With this sentence the story comes to an end, leaving the reader baffled over the incongruity or outright absurdity of the encounter Biller has created on less than just half a page. Neither the sequencing, nor the pairing of events and actions, nor the abrupt and open ending allow for a facile reading. Here, Biller performs risky cultural labor bound to violate the tacit protocol dictating the way we think and write the Jewish experience in Biller’s Germany – a strategy the Jewish writer and critic Lena Gorelik aptly summarizes in her review of Biller’s style in the *Jüdische Allgemeine* in 2014 with the words: “Biller möchte eine Story, ‘die voller Leben und Widersprüche ist.’”<sup>216</sup> Consider the improbability of the Jew Feilchenduft dreaming of being Hitler (and of authoring *Mein Kampf*, at that) and transforming into the legendary *zaddik* figure, to then return in the costume of a Jewish mendel looking to strike a business deal with Hess. Imagining and enacting the union of three tropic figures in the Jew Feilchenduft, i.e., the postwar Jew, the paradigmatic Oriental Jew, and his nemesis Hitler, in one and the same character, creates a jarring effect. From a historical perspective, undoubtedly, the three have a direct relationship with each other, yet most certainly not in the way suggested here at first glance. The highly unsettling, if not subversive quality of this scenario is derived from its

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<sup>214</sup> “he looks blankly at the zaddik who rhythmically moves his upper body forward and backward”

<sup>215</sup> “the wonder rabbi had changed into Feilchenduft, who asked Hess if he was interested in the collection of women’s lingerie.”

<sup>216</sup> “Biller wants a story ‘full of life and contradictions’”



illegibility for the reader who is challenged by Biller's reshuffling and merging of different representational modalities and tropes.

Biller's tease operates on the sensibilities of his readership in two crucial ways: for one, he disrupts the typificatory schemes agreed upon in postwar Germany that regulate how we must read or represent these figures, be it the postwar Jew, the Oriental Jew, or Hitler. Typificatory schemes make up our "social stock of knowledge" (Berger 41) and provide us with the framework for recognizing others and thus with a structure by which others become intelligible. They are a critical tool for equipping us with the "knowledge of norms, values and even emotions" (Berger 76) that society has objectified in role typologies. When this common knowledge fails to cohere because what we apprehend deviates from what we have learned, we find ourselves in a state of disorientation, for explanations no longer correspond and familiar translational processes falter. Biller's story infringes upon the carefully established code of representing Jews and their social roles in Germany since the postwar years, where there has been little tolerance for depicting Jews other than as victims, or for expressing suspicion of their presumed moral high ground. The public outcry over attempts at differentiating the image of Jews in Germany, for example in Rafael Seligmann's early novels *Rubinsteins Versteigerung* (1989) or *Der Musterjude* (1997) "by representing unsympathetic images of Jews" (Mc Glothlin 240) illustrates the sensitivities involved in a shift in perceptions that Seligmann's and Biller's works model. In Biller, Feilchenduft's surrealistic dream distorts the typifications assigned to the tropic figures he embodies and thus destabilizes the meaning of all of them: neither the postwar Jew, nor the Oriental Jew, nor Hitler is left intact. The scramble of these figures and the establishment of multiple identities considered incompatible in the single figure of the postwar Jew serve to conflate the coordinates of identity written into each of them. This, in a way,

complicates and confuses – or in short, mystifies – our knowledge of figures considered familiar and easily recognizable.

Secondly, at the same time as Biller boldly thus obscures figures and roles thought intelligible and stably defined, he also demystifies the narratives that give meaning to these figures and the worldview they hold. The adoption, transformation and distortion of a strand of the Jewish narrative tradition designed to promote a Jewish renewal turns out to undermine the very premise of this genre's mission. It appears that Biller instrumentalizes the genre to strike out in two directions: first, by creating his own unbelievable story, he implicitly discredits his model Buber and thus those beliefs and myths encoded in the Chassidic story once regarded the source for reaching “the great messianic ideal of Judaism” (Moore 30); second, he challenges the cultural narratives – today's myths – that we've created to explain our world. Consequently, Biller's stories are about unmasking the constructedness of all kinds of narratives, past and present.

This gesture of demystification becomes particularly palpable with the mention of Hitler's programmatic manifesto *Mein Kampf* and the analogy Biller suggests between Hitler's infamous work and the work of the *zaddik*. If Biller's *zaddik* is capable of authoring Hitler's warped ideology in *Mein Kampf*, then his implicit referent, Buber's *zaddik*, may well be responsible for producing a different set of lies and deceptions. I'm in no way suggesting a literal interpretation or that Biller believes Jews to be the authors of Hitler's manifesto. Rather, I believe Biller to be targeting a discourse of religion, Judaism, to argue against the promises held out by what he considers religion's myths. The analogy between Hitler and the *zaddik* in his embodiment of the Oriental Jew, and the correlation Biller conjectures between the two, suggests a sobering conclusion: it draws on the painful realization that the Holocaust –

symbolized in the text with the mention of Hitler and his teachings – has effectively destroyed the possibility of finding explanations for our world in Chassidic teachings (let alone the joy in the here and now that Chassidism promises). In retrospect, neither Chassidism, nor the ghetto lifestyle integral to the Chassidic community's belief in fulfillment and wholeness, nor the kind of existence the ghetto engendered, proved to be viable. Given the cruel reality of the erasure of European Jewry under the Nazis, Chassidism had produced only myths unfit to prepare Jews for the horrors of the world in front of them.

Taking my analysis a step further, Biller's fusion of the three tropical figures is a reminder of how Hitler and the Holocaust stand between the Oriental and the postwar Jew, between the ghetto of the past and the ghetto of the present. It is a critique of Buber's attempt at Jewish renewal, since the Holocaust and its memory continue to interfere with, and short-circuit, any effort to find meaning or redemption in a corrupted world betrayed by the mysticism Chassidism had sponsored. There is a productive tension in Biller between two complementary and dual impulses: to demystify and to mystify. However, Biller refuses to offer any transcendental answers. Rather, Biller's stories thrive on parodying their Chassidic model, making use of its features to reshuffle factual and fictive elements to the point of the absurd to challenge past and present narratives of Jewishness.

When Biller reads Buber's mysticism against the knowledge of the Holocaust, any narrative or worldview that manipulates realities in strictly ideological terms turns into an instrument of deception. In a mix of parody and farce, Biller inverts not only the Chassidic story and its premise of conveying wisdoms, but he also introduces profound skepticism about his own world into the story. His rhetorical gesture that the Jew Feilchenduft, in his incarnation as Oriental wonder rabbi, generates Hitler's myth launches the uncanny idea of Judaism (and

religion more generally) as yet another deceptive myth on par with Hitler's lies. Here, Biller creates a textual space where answers are anything but certain. New wisdoms emerge from the deconstruction of myths he implicates in the Holocaust and a difficult German Jewish postwar reality. Employing Buber's stories as implicit text against which he offers up his critique of German and Jewish perceptions of that reality, Biller performs the work of an agent provocateur. He makes visible and legible what he believes has been veiled and obscured in the course of postwar history with its culture of Jewish silence and invisibility. Instead of giving his readership the comfort Buber's project seeks to provide, Biller subscribes to a tone bare of the spiritual intensity and warmth found in the stories of the Chassidim. Rather than putting their minds at ease, he confronts his readership with the hidden and ugly underbelly of the world he lives in. Above all, his investment in the absurd as an exercise of artistic invention results in the demystification of the past Jewish experience at the same time as it complicates the Jewish postwar narrative. Merging the Oriental Jew, Hitler, and the postwar Jew in one and the same character, Biller makes a political investment that resonates in Feldman's (142) labeling of Biller and his "politics of confrontation that strikes at the heart of moral, ethical, and historical revisionism."

Another example of Biller's "politics of confrontation" and interference in public discourses is the anecdotal story "Kongo" from *Moralische Geschichten*. Again, we find a carefully edited convergence of fact and fiction that creatively scrambles the temporal scheme of historical events and causal relations. Compressed into a little over a page, Biller's story conjoins figures from different times in history, locales, and backgrounds to establish alternative dependencies and entanglements. His character Brody, assumedly Jewish, enjoys his career and many privileges with the German army: "er durfte als einziger in der Kompanie ausschlafen,

das Frühstück – Tee Wyssotzki, Matze Crunchies und ‘Lubawitscher Daily’ – wurde ihm vom Unteroffizier persönlich ans Bett gebracht”<sup>217</sup>(MG 156), and while other soldiers crawl through the thicket of the woods, Brody “sass gemütlich in der Stube und diskutierte mit Oberstleutnant Treskow das Prinzip der Ich-Ethik bei Martin Buber”<sup>218</sup> (MG 156). With these few introductory lines, Biller manages to unravel historical narratives and begins to spin its shreds into a new story. Several characters from different spatio-temporal backgrounds intersect to create a counterfactual scenario: Brody, arguably crafted in the image of Biller’s contemporary Michael Wolffsohn, the outspoken and self-declared “German-Jewish patriot” (Wolffsohn 126) and active member of the *Bundeswehr*, finds himself in philosophical discussions with his superior Tresckow about Martin Buber’s seminal essay *Ich und Du*. Both Buber and Tresckow are charged historical figures originating in separate contexts: Buber, the father of Jewish cultural Zionism and author of a philosophical work about the dialogic principle, i.e. “the duality of primal relations” (Stanford); and Henning Tresckow,<sup>219</sup> a major in the Deutsche Wehrmacht, who turned from supporter of national socialism to opponent of Nazi politics, becoming the mastermind behind the botched coup against Hitler in 1943. More recently, Michael Wolffsohn (126) has made himself a name as a German Jew with strong national feelings he defines as “inwardly directed nationalism.” Wyssotzki may well reference the Russian singer and poet Wladimir Semjonowitsch Wyssotzki (1938-1980), whose prose addressed the topic of anti-Semitism considered taboo in the Soviet Union and made him the target of political

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<sup>217</sup> “he was the only one in the regiment allowed to sleep in and he was served breakfast in bed – Wyssotzki tea, matzah crunchies and the ‘Lubawitch Daily’ – by the corporal himself”

<sup>218</sup> “sat comfortably in the lounge and discussed with commander Treskow the principle of Martin Buber’s I and thou ethics”

<sup>219</sup> His biography

persecution.<sup>220</sup> Tellingly, Biller points toward a resemblance between Brody, alias Wolffsohn, and the Oriental ghetto Jew already known from his other stories when noting that:

Bei Besuchen von Politikern stand er [Brody] immer ganz vorn, und wenn sie von Treskow wissen wollten, wer dieser kleine bärtige Mann mit Kaftan, Schläfenlocken und einer alten El-Al Snacktüte in der hinteren linken Hosentasche sei, flüsterte Treskow: “Das ist Brody, für uns Mahnung, Erinnerung und Warnung zugleich”<sup>221</sup> (MG 156).

Given the role Biller assigns to the ghetto Jew as a symbol of escapism and willed blindness in the face of disturbing political developments, the analogy between this figure and Brody transfers those negative qualities from one to the other, i.e. from the Oriental ghetto Jew to the postwar German Jew. The presence of the ghetto Jew in Brody serves as a reminder of what Biller considers the ghetto mentality among contemporary Jews – a warning sign directed at his fellow-Jews. Brody’s comfortable position in the military and willing acceptance of his special treatment validate observations from the early 1990s that Susan Stern (20) summarizes in the following words: “no matter how negatively or positively they are viewed, Jews in Germany are ‘special’ . . . . They are also ‘special’ because there are so few of them, so each individual becomes the representative of the entire Jewish population in Germany.” Brody, too, is perceived as special, and the German military caters to his status akin to that of an endangered species and its supposed survival needs: he is served Jewish matzah for breakfast and gets his information from the official news organ of the Chabad-Chassidim. The daily arguably becomes a poetic signpost for the continued dissemination of myths circulated with the

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<sup>220</sup> The *Spiegel online* article “Kino-Biografie ‘Wyssozki’: Russische Musiklegende im Visier des KGB,” from 2011, details Wyssozki’s life and work as outspoken regime critic.

<sup>221</sup> “Upon visits from politicians, he [Brody] always stood right up front, and when they wanted to know from Treskow who this little bearded, kaftan-clad man with the pajes and old El-Al snack bag in the left hind pant pocket was, Treskow whispered: ‘This is Brody, reminder, memory and warning for us all at the same time.’”

help of German authorities and nurtured by philo-Semitic sentiments. Quite literally, Brody is being served up by German authorities and fed the very lies that keep intact the status quo Biller finds so disturbing.

But, more disturbingly perhaps, Biller's analogy points to the possibility that Germans continue to misunderstand what Jewishness means. Germans seem to conflate Jewish identity when they condense the postwar Jew in the stereotype of the Oriental Jew. As a result of this confusion, each living Jew in Germany is not only representative of all Jews in Germany, but becomes synonymous with the quintessential Holocaust victim. It's a dangerous shortcut, a form of over-simplification that threatens to propagate racist knowledge about Jews and prejudice against Jews among Germans. Even more so, this postwar Jew is quite literally reduced to a miniature person, not of equal size and stature, kept in the pant pocket of the German to be paraded around at will. Although at first glance, the mention of the ghetto Jew seems to testify to German feelings of guilt and a national conscience troubled by past horrors, Biller ends up adding a twist to this assumption. He faults both Jews and Germans for maintaining a dysfunctional symbiotic relationship that makes the ghetto an all too comfortable home for Jews and permits Germans to keep Jews marginalized in a space they control.

The story's ending further underscores the problematic of this relationship: Treskow participates in German military action in the Congo<sup>222</sup> and commits suicide "wie schon zwölf andere seiner nahen männlichen Verwandten vor ihm"<sup>223</sup> (MG 157) the very day after he violently settles an argument with a group of child soldiers. Although Treskow, apparently fully aware of the symbolic value of every Jewish life, had purposely left Brody out of the Kongo

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<sup>222</sup> The *Bundeswehr* participated in the EU humanitarian mission in the Kongo in 2003 and in a 2006 operation to protect elections.

<sup>223</sup> "just like twelve of his male relatives before him"

mission for fear of losing “das so kostbare Leben von Brody im Irrenhaus von Ituri”<sup>224</sup> (MG 156), he actually commits his own kind of genocide when he kills off the army of “schwerbewaffnete Siebenjährige in Stöckelschuhen und Rastaperücken”<sup>225</sup> (MG 156) after one of them steps on his foot. This outcome makes for an all too perverse situation that raises the question of the hypocrisy of German guilt and philo-Semitic sentiments. Analogous to the Jewish genocide just decades earlier, we find genocidal warfare in Africa in the present. From “Ach, Brody, . . . warum ist Geschichte eine solche Last?”<sup>226</sup> (MG 157), Treskow’s rhetorical question to Brody in his farewell letter, we understand Biller’s overarching message: history repeats itself and neither party involved ever learns from past events, despite history’s warnings. Treskow’s philo-Semitism proves to be lip service only, and Brody’s opportunistic patriotism a trap from which he refuses to escape.

In sum, Biller’s wisdoms in *Moralische Geschichten* are informed by their profound skepticism of our world and all those discourses and narratives that legitimize, maintain and give meaning to it. Making semantically available rival perspectives of lived reality in his Germany, Biller’s stories conjecture complex associations between such competing definitions to connect familiar figures and events in unfamiliar constellations. As a result of the webbed and causal relations he creates, Biller offers a dystopian view of post-unification Germany where the German Jewish relationship is based on hypocrisy. The discovery of lies leads to new lies, rather than to corrective solutions. Thus, he posits a thoroughly corrupt political and social world in Germany, with Germans and Jews equally responsible for perpetuating the status quo and complicit in sustaining a dystopian order. This order integrates myths and historical facts

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<sup>224</sup> “Brody’s precious life in the madhouse of Ituri”

<sup>225</sup> “heavily armed seven-year-olds in high heels and dreadlocks”

<sup>226</sup> “Oh, Brody, . . . why is history such a burden?”



into an absurd and dysfunctional German/Jewish relationship. Biller's look under the surface of everyday reality produces what Harry Harootunian (476), in his philosophical discussion of the "historical present," defines as "thickened present": i.e., "a present filled with traces of different moments and temporalities, weighted with sediments." Biller's appropriation of the Chassidic story from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Jewish literary archive transports those past moments into the present and into his fictional renderings of the German Jewish world. The strategy also allows Biller to formulate a new Jewish idiom that can articulate the paradox of the German and Jewish relationship at the turn of the millennium; lastly, it allows him to dismantle the foundation of the Jewish postwar ghetto. Challenging what Berger and Luckman (125) call the "taken-for-granted reality of the traditional status quo," Biller works to break down the contemporary ghetto walls that not only separate Jews and Germans but also outline the confines of the postwar dystopia.

### **3.2.3 Coming to Terms with the Present**

If the adaptation of the Chassidic story serves to artistically explore the intersection of German and Jewish history and contemporary discourses, then Biller's invocation of the Jewish ghetto story extends this project. The genre of ghetto writing emerged in Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in tandem with Jewish emancipatory struggles and takes as its subject the traditional Jewish living space, the "Judengasse," or "ghetto." Florian Krobb (3), in *Ghetto Writing*, offers a definition of the Jewish ghetto as a "real or imagined space where polarized conceptions of German-Jewish identities such as openness and closure, assimilation and orthodoxy, are constructed, negotiated, and evaluated." He further argues that "in German-Jewish ghetto writing the ghetto becomes a contested metaphor representing moral integrity and

backwardness, sameness and difference, an idyllic and repressive world” (Krobb 6) characterized by its ambivalence. As I showed in my discussion in the first chapter, the collection of ghetto stories by Leopold Kompert and Karl Emil Franzos’ *Der Pojaz* exemplify this ambivalence – an ambivalence that becomes recognizable through the Orientalist worldview and attitude the authors adopt in their work.

Different from the short anecdotal stories of *Moralische Geschichten*, many of Biller’s longer stories recall Krobb’s definition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ghetto story. He, too, approaches his subject matter from a distinctly Jewish perspective, his stories populated with Jewish characters who must define themselves in response to the gentile German world around them. Their strangeness parallels the exoticism of the Jewish characters in Kompert and Franzos from over a century earlier and constitutes itself in a variety of markers of difference: religious and cultural practices, language, names, and spatial identifications. However, the contemporary Jewish ghetto into which Biller grants his readers a privileged glimpse tells a story different from the depictions in its literary precursors. Whereas in Kompert we find a utopian model of the ghetto located in the past – the idealized rendering of a sanitized Orient, as I have argued – Biller offers a more nuanced and sobering view of the Jewish ghetto. His contemporary ghetto lacks those nostalgic notions of home, belonging, and community found in Kompert. And, while Franzos paints the ghetto in all of its unenlightened backwardness in the idiom of the Orientalist, Biller also finds value and possibilities in this uniquely Jewish world. Instead of reading Biller’s short stories as an instance of one or the other polarized take on the ghetto, this section demonstrates that his kind of ghetto writing from 2000 houses the full spectrum of tensions typical of the genre. It exploits the memory of the Oriental ghetto for Biller’s own projection of a newly configured modern ghetto – a ghetto that contains the many different

aspects of the Jewish experience. A result of the collision of different experience, I submit, Biller is able to address his vision and championship of a new Jewish geography in Germany and in Europe.

Granted, the ghetto is not the only possible model of identification in Biller. Yet, its idea comprises other categories that traditionally play a role in Jewish identity formation and that many of Biller's characters must negotiate. Questions about genealogical, ethnic, religious, or diasporic definitions of Jewishness run parallel to notions of Jewish identity as a performance or choice. However, I find the notion of the modern ghetto particularly striking and productive in Biller. The various categories Biller engages always serve to emphasize Jewish otherness in Germany. Being the ultimate symbol of Jewish difference, the ghetto effectively epitomizes that otherness. Examples from several stories lend themselves to an examination of those markers of difference that inform Biller's notion of the ghetto. I will concentrate first on one select text before expanding my argument to his oeuvre at large. Forming a steady through-line in Biller, these markers don't simply encode stereotyped Jewishness. Rather, they become a resource to inspect, negotiate and shape Jewish identity in the present context under Biller's penmanship.

Of particular interest for its exemplary citation of a number of such ghetto markers is the story "Verrat" (betrayal) in *Wenn ich einmal reich und tot bin* – Biller's inaugural story collection, first published in 1990. The publisher's introduction lauds Biller for his depictions of "die Realität des jüdischen Lebens in Deutschland – und dazu auf eine bis dahin nicht gekannte Weise"<sup>227</sup> and of "eine verwickelte, in sich geschlossene Welt."<sup>228</sup> Indeed, the world Biller describes in "Verrat" is unfamiliar; it documents the young protagonist Hugo Niehouss'

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<sup>227</sup> "reality of Jewish life in Germany – and that in a hitherto unfamiliar fashion"

<sup>228</sup> "a complex and self-contained world"

emotional and physical journey into his self-imposed Jewish ghetto in the Germany of the late '80s. Written in the style of a retrospective, the third-person narrator introduces Hugo, a Jew, in his current role of chief literary critic at a Munich-based journal who finds himself irritated by the discovery of a newspaper article in the *FAZ* about a German archeologist in Beersheva with claims to have successfully translated “die prä-historischen El-hamak-Keilzeichen.”<sup>229</sup> On one hand, for Hugo, Kaltz’ translation promises clarity about the myth of Jewish origins: “es liesse sich endlich herausfinden, was vor Abraham und Isaak kam, das heisst, wer und wo die Juden waren, bevor sie im chaldäischen Ur aus einem mythischen DNS-Nichts heraus plötzlich auftauchten”<sup>230</sup> (WRT 187). On the other hand, Hugo reacts with consternation when concluding “was für eine Chuzpe! Was für ein erhellender Irrgarten aus Wahrheit und Lüge und Wahrheit”<sup>231</sup> (WRT 187).

These opening lines introduce what Biller considers a basic problem and imbalance in the German-Jewish relationship. As we come to learn, Hugo had been engaged in a difficult personal search for his Jewish identity just a few years earlier and seems to take issue with the fact that a German scientist may hold the key to the Jewish collective’s beliefs in its origins. Quite obviously, the translation Kaltz produces has metaphorical weight: Biller’s scenario implies that Germans not only have the power to give meaning to Jewishness, but they potentially control the very premise of Jewishness. Taking this idea a bit further, Jews in Germany can only understand themselves with the help of Germans, their identity subject to the whims and manipulations of the dominant culture and always under threat of losing its

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<sup>229</sup> “the pre-historic El-hamak-wedge characters”

<sup>230</sup> “finally, one would find out what had been before Abraham and Isaac, i.e. who and where the Jews had been before they suddenly appeared in the Chaldean Ur out of mythical DNA-nothingness.”

<sup>231</sup> “what chutzpah! This illuminating maze of truth and lies and truth”

legitimation. Kaltz' discovery may also be understood to affect the Jewish individual. Hugo himself provides such example. He experiences the vulnerability of his own Jewishness when his chosen career path and role as public figure result in constant challenges from the non-Jewish world. His retreat into the Jewish ghetto turns out to be a necessary and defensive move of survival.

Having grown up in a "1-A-Protestantenfamilie"<sup>232</sup> (WRT 189) as the only child of Johannes-Georg and Andrea Niehouss, Hugo had long remained ignorant of his mother's Jewish lineage and her personal history as a Holocaust survivor. Curiously, after his graduation from the gymnasium and still unaware of his maternal family origins, Hugo begins "aus heiterem Himmel heraus, statt in eine deutsche Uniform zu schlüpfen, ein israelitisches Kibbuznik-Käppi auf[zu]setzte[n], um mit der *Aktion Sühnezeichen* auf nahöstliche Goodwill-Tour zu gehen"<sup>233</sup> (WRT 190). While his family initially ignores his suspicious transformation, once he exclusively associates with Jewish friends and only reads Jewish books, wears the Star of David around his neck and eats matzah for Easter, the family decides to open up the family archives over a festive lunch at the *Löwenspieker* to tell him the truth. To the surprise of his parents, Hugo responds to this "*Löwenspieker-Konferenz*" with radical actions, "als habe das frische Wissen um die jüdische Herkunft plötzlich seine aschkenasischen Enzyme und Gene in Bewegung gebracht"<sup>234</sup> (WRT 191). Within weeks he gets circumcised by a mohel, changes his first name to Yoram, turns into "den wehleidigsten und tollpatschigsten Jeschiwe-Bocher [ab],

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<sup>232</sup> "top-notch Protestant family"

<sup>233</sup> "out of the blue, instead of putting on a German uniform, he put on an Israeli Kibbutz cap, in order to go on a goodwill tour in the Near East with *Aktion Sühnezeichen*."

<sup>234</sup> "as if the new knowledge of his Jewish lineage had stirred his Ashkenazi enzymes and genes"

den die Hamburger jüdische Jugend aufzuweisen hatte”<sup>235</sup> (WRT 192) and chooses to speak with a Yiddish syntax and accent.

“Hugo’s Rückkehr zu seinen Wurzeln”<sup>236</sup> (WRT 192) and spectacular metamorphosis proves to be a reversal of his mother’s assimilation years prior and entails his complete rejection of her and her decision to become “ein faules gojisches Stück”<sup>237</sup> (WRT 189). If she had abandoned all traces of her Jewishness to make the transition from “einer entwurzelten Holocaust-Überlebenden [in] eine saturierte Deutsche”<sup>238</sup> (WRT 190), Hugo, upon learning about his ancestry, finds himself compelled to correct “den Erbfehler seiner Mutter”<sup>239</sup> (WRT 192). Gradually, Hugo retreats into the ghetto his mother had left behind with the loss of her family in the Holocaust and her subsequent chosen assimilation, epitomized in her name change from Lea to Andrea and from Sonnenson to her married name of Niehouss. Lea’s “inbrünstige Selbstverleugnung”<sup>240</sup> (189) as Jewess is matched by Hugo’s radical denial of his gentile background and upbringing. He breaks with his parents and moves to Munich where he finds a new family in the local Jewish community and a new calling in his professional pursuits as a journalist. Cut off from his past life and now fully invested in his Jewishness, Hugo dwells in a minority space that is marked by the two rivaling discourses of anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism prominent in Germany. From his platform as a public critic, he experiences himself as representative of either the “grosses, stolzes Zahnrad in der Mythosmaschine ‘Jüdische

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<sup>235</sup> “turns into the most whining and clumsy Jeshiwah student among Hamburg’s Jewish youth”

<sup>236</sup> “Hugo’s return to his roots”

<sup>237</sup> “a lazy gentile no-good”

<sup>238</sup> “from an uprooted Holocaust survivor into a saturated German”

<sup>239</sup> “his mother’s genetic defect”

<sup>240</sup> “fervent self-denial”

Weltverschwörung”<sup>241</sup> (WRT 194), or the “fleischgewordene Gute-Kluge-Jüdische-Tote, das in Deutschland Museumswert hatte”<sup>242</sup> (WRT 194), respectively. Importantly, he must navigate his Jewishness in response to these discourses – a fact that determines the very parameters of this minority space and the contours of his identity. Biller seems to emphasize the contingencies of this new ghetto space in the Germany of today by citing repeatedly the German archeologist’s translational project, thus hinting at its ever-looming impact on the identity of German Jewry.

Further, in contradistinction to previous models of the ghetto and its relative cohesiveness, Biller’s ghetto is a uniquely postwar, fragmented and German one. It houses today several generations of Jews separated by their experience of and attitudes about being Jewish in the wake of the Holocaust, yet united by the shared struggle to carve a space for themselves. Hugos’s mother’s life exemplifies one possible strategy for accomplishing just that. Her choice to assimilate is part of the structure of invisibility the survivor generation sets up and clings to in order to live on. Tellingly, while her cultural assimilation grants her the desired agency and control over her destiny, her son’s discovery of his ethnic roots and rediscovery of the very ethnic identity she had abandoned discredits her choice and agency. When Hugo uncovers her invisibility and muteness as a Jewess, he raises doubts about his mother’s ability to have a voice. Although Lea had escaped the Polish prewar ghetto, Hugo’s self-confident embrace of Jewishness and implicit critique of his mother’s path places her squarely in the postwar ghetto. After all, the words he chooses to describe his mother are those Biller uses to frame the typical postwar Jew elsewhere: “er betrachtete sie als Verräterin, als ein mieses und

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<sup>241</sup> “the big, proud cog in the myth-making machine called ‘Jewish world conspiracy’”

<sup>242</sup> “incarnation of the good-intelligent-Jewish-dead, which carried singular value in Germany”

opportunistisches Nichts, als einen aussergewöhnlich dummen Menschen”<sup>243</sup> (WRT 192) and someone who sells her soul to a German life of “Elbchaussee-Wohlstand”<sup>244</sup> (WRT 189). It is only through the eyes of the younger generation that the presumed ghetto of the parents becomes perceptible. In attributing to his mother the presumed features of the postwar ghetto Jew, Hugo sets himself and his generation apart from the parent generation.

Condemning the parents’ path of withdrawal and advocating a new visibility of Jewishness, Biller’s character Hugo models the re-appropriation of the very markers of difference his mother had shed, creating a ghetto-like existence for himself from where he challenges his gentile environment. Thus, when Hugo’s predecessor, the Jewish literary critic Juraj Liegler, known as “der deutsche Literaturjude”<sup>245</sup> (WRT 194), retires to make alijah, i.e., to move to Israel, and his position must be filled, his possible replacement with a non-Jewish German opens up the prospect “dass sie in Kürze ganz unter sich wären: und dann liesse sich in Deutschland wieder ungestört leben und denken und schreiben . . .”<sup>246</sup> (WRT 195) – a move that could efficiently seal the ghetto walls Hugo believes keep Jews silent. Yet, Hugo decides to take a stand “bis wirklich allen klar war, dass gerade Hugo Niehouss Lieglers Platz einnehmen sollte”<sup>247</sup> (WRT 195), risking accusations that “er die Beförderung einzig und allein seinem halbnackten Schwanz zu verdanken habe”<sup>248</sup> (WRT 195). In self-confidently flaunting and thematizing his difference in all its stereotypical glory, he draws attention to his Jewishness to

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<sup>243</sup> “he considered her a traitor, a miserable and opportunistic nothing, as an exceptional fool”

<sup>244</sup> “Elbchaussee-affluence”

<sup>245</sup> “the German literature Jew”

<sup>246</sup> “that shortly they would be amongst themselves: and then, one would be able to live, think and write in Germany without disturbances . . .”

<sup>247</sup> “until they all realized that Hugo Niehouss should take Liegler’s position”

<sup>248</sup> “he owed his promotion to his half-naked cock”



counter those forces in Germany wishing to rid the country of the supposed “Jewish conspiracy.”<sup>249</sup> Hugo’s deliberate re-ethnicization turns Jewish invisibility into visibility, yet comes at a price to be paid by the Jewish community: when Hugo one day on his way to work in Munich apprehends in the crowd at the Marienplatz the contours of a seemingly familiar female, he turns around to catch briefly “das Spiegelbild einer verängstigten und traurigen Jüdin”<sup>250</sup> (WRT 197) in the window of the bookstore behind. On second glance, the face is gone and he stares at the display behind the glass of “alte Bilder, Bilder von Juden, die in selbstgeschaukelte Massengräber fielen, Bilder von Deportationszügen, vom brennenden Warschauer Ghetto und vor allem von den KZ-Gummipuppen-Toten, die wie Sardinen über- und nebeneinander lagen – Bilder von der grössten Ungerechtigkeit dieser Welt also”<sup>251</sup> (WRT 197). While the display reminds Hugo of his mother and her arguments, he actually fails to recognize her face – a failure attesting to his inability to project himself into his mother’s past or more specifically into the past of the Holocaust survivor. It appears that the assimilated and unmarked Jew is an aberration, a stranger amidst the community of younger Jews. Much like the parents in Kompert’s *Der Dorfgeher* are unable to imagine the assimilated Jew of the future in their returning son (they fail to recognize Emanuel upon his visit home after years of absence and in his assimilated state), the son in Biller’s story fails to apprehend the assimilated Holocaust Jew, even if embodied by his own mother. Here, Biller points to a widening gap

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<sup>249</sup> Biller’s strategy, i.e., the instrumentalization of Jewish stereotypes and the performance within stereotypical discourse with the intent to provoke, heralds the stylistic achievement of Turkish writer Feridun Zaimogly, in *Kanaksprak*, from 1995, and his method of provocation.

<sup>250</sup> “the mirror image of a terrified and sad Jewess”

<sup>251</sup> “old pictures, pictures of Jews who fell into mass graves they had shoveled themselves, pictures of deportation train cars, of the burning Warsaw ghetto and above all of concentration camp rubber doll-dead, who were wedged on top and next to each other like sardines – pictures of the greatest injustice in this world”

between the survivor generation and the younger generation of Jews in Germany – parallel to the generational rift in Kompert – for whom the Holocaust, it seems, no longer functions as the determining factor of Jewish identity and for whom neither the withdrawal into the private space, nor assimilation into the dominant culture, is a viable option.

The last lines in the text express this sense of alienation and the shifting sensibilities within the Jewish community. Hugo's mother decides not to bother her son after recognizing his face in the display window, ruminating that "nie würde er verstehen, was die Vernichtung war, er wurde in eine andere Zeit hineingeboren, und in dieser Zeit konnte man es sich leisten, ein frecher, selbstbewusster Jude zu sein – egal, ob man als solcher schon zur Welt kam oder es erst allmählich werden musste"<sup>252</sup> (WRT 198). In assigning Hugo's ghetto an unmistakable stamp of time in the present, Biller historicizes the ghetto. He suggests the elasticity of its meaning, which must always be renegotiated and reinscribed to do justice to a changing lived reality. Yet, he also makes it clear that the ghetto continues to exist, if not as the concrete, physical space found in the "Judengasse" of the past, then conceptually in the figure of Jewish alterity in the German Jewish experience of today. The different perceptions of the ghetto found in this story correspond to the variances in mentalities and generational perspectives. Already here by 1990, Biller brings into representation a trend Jeffrey Peck observes fifteen years later and from a sociological perspective in the current diversification of the Jewish community in Germany.

Aesthetically, Biller's rendering of the contemporary ghetto relies on repeated representations of those markers of difference that historically shape our knowledge of the Eastern shtetl – markers that make the ghetto easily recognizable. But, if Biller invokes this

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<sup>252</sup> "never would he understand what extermination meant, he was born into a different era, and in this era one could afford to be a brazen, self-confident Jew – no matter, if one arrived at this world that way, or if one had to turn into one over time"

ghetto past straight out in one of his stories, he references it in more circuitous terms in others. In particular, if quite literal and stereotypical depictions of Orientalized Jewishness conjure up the image of the traditional ghetto and its inhabitants, then Biller time and again forces those very associations through the mention of other features intrinsic to this image.

The following examples should elucidate my point. Biller recalls the ghetto in rather unmistakable terms when one of his characters decides to invert his postwar acculturation and revert to his ancestral ghetto type: “Mit der Wut eines Betrogenen beschloss er, endlich alles zu lernen, was man als Jude wissen sollte. Er legte Tfillim an und trug Zizit, er ging . . . fast täglich in die orthodoxe Ohel-Jakob-Synagoge, er ass kosher und weigerte sich, samstags in der Schule zu schreiben”<sup>253</sup> (BT 105). Another character, Finkelstein, is defined by his “kleines Jeschiwa-Schüler-Gesicht”<sup>254</sup> (LVV 163), and yet another one “hatte Pajes unter seinem schwarzen Hut, und er trug einen Kaftan”<sup>255</sup> (LVV 160), or comes in the shape of “einen jungen jüdischen Gelehrten mit Streimel und Schläfenlocken”<sup>256</sup> (Bernsteintage 88). Other examples, yet, demonstrate how Biller summons the ghetto in less direct but equally powerful terms. He thus assigns his present-day characters the colorful names belonging to the traditional Ashkenazim Jew: Berele Hornstein, Menasche Zuckerboim, Schlomo Levin, Jossel, Amichai Süßmann, Beerenbaum, Weintrojb, Mimosenduft, Jossilein, Himmelfarb, Reb Reich, Rabbi Löw, Feilchenduft, Nadelbaum, Tuvi Katz, Norma Glickstein, Adi Silberstein, Yakov Frenkel, Henry Diamant, Feigel, Hirschbein, Itzik ben Israel ben Farbstein, Jentel, Schlomo Levin, and

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<sup>253</sup> Filled with the rage of someone duped he decided to finally learn everything one should know as a Jew. He put on the tefillin and wore zizit, he went . . . almost daily to the Orthodox Ohel-Jakob-Synagogue, ate kosher and refused to write in school on Saturdays.”

<sup>254</sup> “small Jeshiwa-student-face”

<sup>255</sup> “had payot under his black hat and wore a kaftan”

<sup>256</sup> “a young Jewish sage with shtreimel and payot”

Tejwe, just to name a few. Without a doubt, these names recall Franzos' 19<sup>th</sup> century characters from "Half-Asia", instead of the acculturated or assimilated German Jew with his typically Germanized name that tends to obscure or conceal the bearer's ethnicity.<sup>257</sup> Here, Biller summons the Oriental Jew metaphorically rather than by way of those physical markers that symbolize Jewish alterity. The indirect interpellation of the contemporary German Jew into Orientalized Jewishness is not coincidental. The names are a constant reminder of his ghetto roots and origins and underscore the close affinity between the modern and the Oriental Jew as well as the possibility of the ancestor's continued interference in Jewishness today.

Biller expands upon this rhetorical effect when he regularly incorporates fragments of the Yiddish language into his stories, proposing at least a lexical return to the Yiddish past. This presents an interesting choice, because historically, Yiddish<sup>258</sup> was associated with unassimilated Eastern Jewry and the stereotype. It came with negative connotations and was considered a handicap in the assimilation process. According to Gabriele von Glasenapp's (55) discussion of *German versus Jargon*, "up to the end of the nineteenth century, the eradication of Yiddish was seen as necessary for social integration into Germany society." Already early on in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Jewish Enlightenment (Haskala) leaders such as Moses Mendelssohn and David Friedlander had sought to promote the use of standard German among their

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<sup>257</sup> Franzos' Jews carry names similar to Biller's: Reb Mortche, Jossele, Itzig Tuerkischgelb, Simche Turteltaub, Mortche Diamant, Reb Elias Wohlgeruch, Chaim Fragezeichen, Schlome Hirsch Mosenthal, Chane Gurkensalat. Many Jews changed their names upon migration into the German cultural sphere to shed the name as a marker of difference. Jack Zipes (Bodemann 171) explains how, during the emancipation process, Jewish names "became crucial in stigmatizing Jews as the other."

<sup>258</sup> Another term for Yiddish is *Jargon*. Krobb (ExM 44) explains how Yiddish was used by Christian authors in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to "re-emphasise the difference of the Jews."

contemporaries and discourage the Jewish vernacular.<sup>259</sup> Friedlander's *Lesebuch für Jüdische Kinder* from 1779 serves as a prime example of this move into German culture by way of rejecting "Judendeutsch" or Jewish German.<sup>260</sup> Further, while Jewish writers like Franzos and Kompert exploited the use of Yiddish to authenticate their depictions of the ghetto (in Franzos negatively, in Kompert to add to the ghetto's supposed homeliness), other writers of ghetto stories like Salomon Mosenthal or Aaron Bernstein felt the need to translate Yiddishisms into standard German. One motivation, was to explain unfamiliar Yiddish vocabulary to their readers, another one was, I suspect, to emphasize the cultural distance between the Western and the Eastern Jew. The translation of foreign words would have accomplished just that. Non-Jewish writers, too, instrumentalized the linguistic idiosyncracies of Yiddish to mark that distance. They used it in negative representations of Jews, often with the intent to discredit their social and moral standing and accentuate their incompatibility with German culture.<sup>261</sup>

Now, Biller seems to be concerned with neither of these legitimizations. Rather, his curious importing of Yiddish – at times in phrases or individual words, at others in full sentences<sup>262</sup> – is yet another rhetorical device to suture contemporary Jewishness to its roots in

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<sup>259</sup> Klaus L. Berghahn (61), in the *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture*, discusses Mendelsohn's "attack" on Yiddish.

<sup>260</sup> Zohar Shavit (68), in the *Yale Companion*, discusses the symbolic significance of this textbook, and although she does not mention Yiddish, it is clear that for Friedlander's project of creating analogies between German and Jewish-Hebrew culture, Yiddish was unsuitable.

<sup>261</sup> Gabriele von Glasenapp gives the example of Gustav Freytag's novel *Soll und Haben* and argues that Jewish writers at the time were well aware of the implications of Yiddish. Florian Krobb (44), in *Between Exile and Assimilation: Language and Identity in German-Jewish Texts around 1848*, quotes from Christian author Julius Voss' *Der travestierte Nathan der Weise* from 1804 to demonstrate how Yiddishisms in theater discourse serve to defame and stigmatize Jews.

<sup>262</sup> Examples are: *Gojim*, *Bajss mich a bissele*, *gefilte fish*, *Schejgez*, "ich bin dir meuchel" (WRT 65), *chala*, *mazze*, *meschugge*, *Chewra Kadischa*, *koscher*, *dybbuk*, *zaddik*, *chag sameach*, *melamed*, *chuzpe*, "wus wer asoj schreckliches daran, wenn ich ajn klajnes v'remegen

Eastern Europe. Carving out a linguistic niche – no matter how small – Biller assigns his peers a space of their own. Figuratively speaking, it is a space where Jews from different backgrounds come together and can be at home, be they traditional or acculturated Jews, from the West or from the East. In this sense, Biller revives the Yiddish language as a common denominator for European Jewry, even if only nominally. It allows for bonding across the Jewish divide and constitutes a unifying feature that can bridge temporal, cultural and geographic distance.

In several instances, characters “jiddeln,” speak in a “Jewish singsong” (LT 79), or “mit [s]einem jiddischen Akzent”<sup>263</sup> (Bernsteintage 73) like the Dudek character from Munich. Or, in another story from 2007 and set in Munich, a group of Jews from various national backgrounds “all got on very well. Polish, Yiddish, and Russian were spoken, and of course German and English too. One of the guests . . . spoke English with a Polish accent, and a beautiful, clear Yiddish that Geli and I understood better than the Yiddish spoken by the ordinary Jews of Munich” (LT 46). In a further example from *Meine Tage mit Frenkel* (WRT 46-7), Hermann from Israel, upon his visit to Frankfurt, “hörte Jiddisch, tatsächlich Jiddisch”<sup>264</sup> on Kaiserstrasse<sup>265</sup>, and is baffled “wieso gerade hier, im Herzen Germaniens, in diesem verbotensten Teil der Welt, . . . wieso also in dieser irdischen Gehenna ein männlicher Passant in einem verdammt nochmal ziemlich toten Idiom aufgefordert wurde, einzutreten und sich ein

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hette” (WRT 249), *Golem, Rebbe, Meisses*, “von wus handelt dajin gecicht, jinglele.” (WRT 196)

<sup>263</sup> “with his Yiddish accent”

<sup>264</sup> “heard Yiddish, Yiddish indeed”

<sup>265</sup> The Frankfurt Kaiserstrasse is at the heart of the “Bahnhofsviertel” and known for its porn shops and prostitution establishments.

paar nackte Titten anzuschauen.”<sup>266</sup> In his encounters first with the Yiddish-speaking doorman – who invites Hermann in with the words “*Kim epes a rein, kim schoin*” – and then with the shop’s owner Yakov Frenkel, Hermann experiences Yiddish as a sign of Jewish brotherhood “nachdem er sich – natürlich – dem Portier als Amchu, als einer von uns, als Jude, zu erkennen gegeben hatte.”<sup>267</sup> Possessing a cohering function, Yiddish not only establishes an immediate camaraderie between these Jews from different parts of the world, but it also gives access to knowledge about the time before the Holocaust when Frenkel, the Holocaust survivor, begins to tell Hermann about his prewar life in Poland. Hermann’s experience with Frenkel over the next few days is good example of the kind of “Jewish articulation of the world” Feldman (140) argues Yiddish makes possible. He finds himself soon under the spell of Frenkel’s stories, fully immersed in the magic of the older man’s Yiddish language: “eine Nacht voller Bildung, vollgestopft mit Frenkel’s Vorkriegserinnerungen, so funkelnd und schön – wenn das Bild erlaubt ist – wie ein polierter Chanukkahleuchter . . .”<sup>268</sup> Here, Biller makes an interesting point when he proposes that storytelling in Yiddish can produce an educational experience for the listener. He strikes out against the German tenet of “Bildung”, which historically denied the Yiddish language any role in education and which supplied the rationale for denigrating Yiddish.

If Yiddish facilitates connections between Jews and Jewish history, it is also a linguistic marker for the trauma of the Holocaust and thus for the complicated relationship between

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<sup>266</sup> “why by all means here, at the hear of Germany, in this forbidden part of the world, . . . why in this earthly gehenna a male passer-by is being addressed in a damn dead idiom to enter and take a look at some naked tits.”

<sup>267</sup> “after he had – of course – signaled to the doorkeeper that he was an amchu, i.e one of them”

<sup>268</sup> “a night full of education, full with Frenkel’s pre-war memories, so sparkling and beautiful – if the image is permitted – like a polished channukah candelabra . . .”

Germans and Jews. For example, Hermann is surprised “dass sie die ganze Zeit Jiddisch miteinander sprechen mussten, weil Frenkel nach zwanzig Jahren, auf deutsch nur Guten Tag und Auf Wiedersehen sagen konnte”<sup>269</sup> (WRT 48). Frenkel’s ignorance of German only emphasizes his refusal to communicate with Germans, or at least, impedes genuine communication. In another story, the immigrant Israeli Russian Jew Lew, in his regular nightmares, “brüllte [er] immerzu jiddische Worte und Sätze, die er auf seine Art teils falsch betonte, teils russisch verballhornte, was daher rührte, dass er bis vor zwei, drei Jahren die Sprache seiner Kindheit noch vollkommen verdrängt hatte”<sup>270</sup> (LVV 72). In either scenario, Yiddish constitutes the voice of the survivor generation (or gives voice to the postmemory of their offspring, as in Lew’s case). It aptly captures the distance between Germans and Jews – a distance the repeated binarism *gojisch* / Jewish in Biller’s stories accentuates. This even holds true for the distance between German Jews and Jews from other national backgrounds. Lew’s only choice to communicate with his girlfriend Assja’s German *and* Jewish lover Mark is in Yiddish. Because of Mark and the need to communicate together in Yiddish, Lew is confronted with painful memories of the past. He therefore finds it “vollkommen logisch, dass er nun seine somnambulen Mayday-Rufe auf jiddisch verschlüsselte. Und auch sonst war es doch nur ganz konsequent: Schliesslich hatte er Mameloschen niemals als das Idiom von etwas so Idiotischen

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<sup>269</sup> “that they had to speak Yiddish to each other the entire time, because Frenkel, after twenty years, could only say good day and good-bye in German”

<sup>270</sup> “[he] shouted Yiddish words and sentences all the time, which he in his own way mispronounced, or parodied in Russian, which is due to the fact that until two, three years ago, he had completely repressed the language of his childhood”



wie der guten alten Shtetl-Idylle betrachtet, sondern allein als die gestammelte Rede fließenden Blutes, inneren Aufruhrs und lärmenden Pogroms”<sup>271</sup> (WRT 72-3).

Hermann and Lew’s examples illustrate certain ironies in the use of the Yiddish language: while the mother tongue (Mameloschen) is a vehicle to enter the Jewish past that can best transport the Jewish experience, it certainly is not meant to nurture any ghetto nostalgia or myths about an idyllic ghetto past. After all, Frenkel turns out to be anything but a positive figure after Hermann learns about his personal Holocaust history and dubious role of “Phoenix von Belzec, Sobibor und Birkenau, wie er seinerzeit von allen wegen seiner Selbstsicherheit in Sachen Überleben genannt worden war”<sup>272</sup> (WRT 47) as well as his questionable reputation as master of the “zeitgenössischen jüdischen Hades”<sup>273</sup> (WRT 62). And for Lew, Yiddish returns him to a past he had long suppressed at the same time as it also allows him to engage with fellow-Jews in the present. Biller’s examples suggest that Yiddish caters to the needs of his peers and their search for modes to articulate the totality of the Jewish experience past and present – a mode that can render justice to the memory of distinctly different moments in the Jewish experience separated by the Holocaust.

Recreating the ghetto by way of direct and indirect citations, Biller makes the figure of the ghetto Jew a prominent fixture in his work throughout. In his artistic emplotment as type and rhetorical gesture, the ghetto Jew is ever-present in the contemporary Jew. Biller adds to his citations a number of geographic signposts that reference Orientalized Jewishness. In invoking

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<sup>271</sup> “completely logical that he encrypted his nightly mayday-calls in Yiddish. And besides, it was only logical: after all, he had never considered the *mameloshen* the idiom of something as idiotic as the good old *shtetl* idyll, but rather as the stammered speech of running blood, of inner turmoil and loud pogroms”

<sup>272</sup> “phoenix of Belzec, Sobibor and Birkenau, as he was called back then because of his self-confidence in matters of survival”

<sup>273</sup> “contemporary Jewish Hades”

the vast historical (and prewar) inventory of Jewish places in Central Europe, he stakes out a Jewish geographic space that the Holocaust had erased and that postwar communist ideology had left blank.<sup>274</sup> Thus, Biller expands the geographic matrix with the help of his Jewish characters: they are travelers, tourists, nomads, diaspora Jews who either already have ties or seek to forge new ones with locales and remaining Jewish communities predominantly in the East. Their ventures take them to visit family members and friends, discover the places of their ancestors, or go on business trips east, commonly von “westliche in östliche Richtung.”<sup>275</sup> For example, Biller mentions “die erbärmliche Armut, das allgegenwärtige Grau, das materielle und moralische Elend, das jenseits von Elbe und Donau und Neisse – all den sanften Revolutionen zum Trotz – nach wie vor herrscht”<sup>276</sup> (TJ 9), and describes Budapest in terms of “einen gigantischen levantinischen Basar”<sup>277</sup> with its “enstpannte Orient-Fiesta-Gefühl”<sup>278</sup> and its quality of the “Wilden Osten,” or Wild East (TJ 11-6). He demonstrates a penchant for the vocabulary of the Orientalist imagination when talking about travels from the “Abendland,” the Occident to the East, i.e., the “asiatische Kolonie”<sup>279</sup> and “asiatischen Land,”<sup>280</sup> and the “Orientexpress.” Biller’s “wild East” stretches from Poland, Russia, Czechoslovakia, the Ural, and Hungary – summarized in the notion of the “Ostblock,” the East block. The “Orient” goes

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<sup>274</sup> While the Holocaust had wiped out most of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, communist ideology in the Soviet Union and behind the “iron curtain” after WWII forced surviving Jews to assimilate and therefore abandon what little had remained of the prewar Jewish space. Thomas Nolden and Vivian Liska, in *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Europe*, mention how the “ideological master narrative” of the communist administrations required Jews to “supersede [their] ethnic particularity” (xviii).

<sup>275</sup> “Western in Eastern direction”

<sup>276</sup> “the wretched poverty, the omnipresent grey, the material and moral misery, which has prevailed beyond Elbe, Danube and Neisse despite the gentle revolutions”

<sup>277</sup> “a gigantic Levantine bazaar”

<sup>278</sup> “relaxed Orient-fiesta feel”

<sup>279</sup> “Asian colony”

<sup>280</sup> “Asian country”

even as far as Israel and Tel Aviv, “das . . . mit dem Gehupe und Gejohle orientalischer war als ganz Israel zusammen und noch ein Stück Libanon dazu”<sup>281</sup> (WRT 52). While it incorporates the cosmopolitan centers of Prague, Vienna, St. Petersburg and Budapest, former centers of Jewish life like Lemberg and Lublin as well as concentration camp sites such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, Bergen-Belsen, Birkenau, and Sobibor, or the “Warschauer Ghetto,” are included in this “wild East”. They all become part of an even larger network of Jewish sites comprising the contemporary Jewish “ghettos” of the West as well: Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Munich, Köln, and Wiesbaden within Germany; and Tel Aviv, Ostjerusalem, Washington, New York, Paris, Basel, and London beyond German national borders.

Littering the landscape of “Mitteleuropa,” central Europe, and the “Orient” with pockets of Jewish life in the present, Biller reminds us of the Jewish geography in Franzos’ and Kompert’s 19<sup>th</sup> century period writings, but adds to it the postwar constellation of the Jewish topography. More importantly, he thus conjectures a *rhetorical* rebirth of European Jewry in his own writing and along with that a semantic shift that paves the way for the *rhetoric* of rebirth of today. This particular rhetoric seems to characterize current depictions not only of German Jewry, yet of European Jewry more generally, and informs cultural and academic discourses from various fields. For example, historian Diana Pinto’s notion of a “new European Jewish space,” educationalist Micha Brumlik’s “idea of a European Jewish renewal” (Bodemann 14), sociologist Y. Michal Bodemann’s concept of “a reemergence of German Jewry” or “return of the European Jewish Diaspora,” literary scholar Erin McGlothlin’s discussion of “a veritable renaissance in German-Jewish literature” (230), or Jeffrey Peck’s headline of “A new Jewish

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<sup>281</sup> “which was . . . with its honking and howling more Oriental than all of Israel combined and a piece of Lebanon included”

Life in Germany”. All share in one way or another the vision of a Jewish rebirth in which German Jewry, surprisingly no doubt, plays a central role. From a cultural studies perspective, Brauch, Lipphardt, and Nocke, in their anthology *Jewish Topographies*, from 2008, discuss the production of Jewish space and the enactment of that space since 1989 in a European context. They conclude that “the events of 1989 have led to a new awareness of Jewish space and Jewish places in Central and Eastern Europe” (Brauch 14) and assert that the “Jewish space resurfaced in public discourse as well as in European citiscapes” (Brauch 15) – a trend, which for writer Ruth Ellen Gruber, in her essay “Beyond Virtually Jewish,” from 2009, can even take on a virtual form and produce “new authenticities and real imaginary spaces in Europe.”<sup>282</sup> Furthermore, this Jewish geography bespeaks the idea of a diaspora zone unencumbered by any formal or national borders. The Jewish characters in Biller, for example, zigzag across borders and create affiliations between the German ghettos and those elsewhere in a transnational network that expresses a particular attitude about place and home sociologist Ulrich Beck calls the “polygamy of place” with reference to migrant populations in the globalized world.

Ironically then, for Biller, Orientalized Jewishness and the ghetto become resources for imagining the renaissance of a German and European Jewish diaspora and sponsoring a kind of re-ethnicization. Biller’s poetics of Jewish visibility in ethnic and geographic terms he launched already in the 1980s anticipates the debates of the 2000s. His project is about appropriating the meaning of the ghetto: reframing the ghetto, he turns it from a metaphor of Jewish marginality and isolation into one of community and non-territorial Jewish diversity. Working with the fully

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<sup>282</sup> Gruber takes up the notion of Jewish space to explore the recreation of Jewish life in Poland today, whereas Brauch’s anthology focuses on the exploration of “lived Jewish spaces” as observable in the “role of actual buildings and their construction process, and their role in contemporary urban life,” in “Jewish quarters,” “cityscapes and landscapes,” or in “all kinds of actions, activities, and stagings that are related to specific places or spaces” (Brauch 18-9).

stocked arsenal of Jewish stereotypes, Biller confronts his readers with what had been screened away and blocked out. Not only does he address “the repressed and censored dimensions of the major language” – to apply Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of a minor literature – yet he also addresses those of the minor language itself, where historically, the ghetto and its inhabitants encapsulated the idea of a contested and ambivalent space in need of censorship. If Orientalized Jewry had been made uncanny through its physical absence in Europe in addition to the mechanism of repression, Biller is unafraid to instrumentalize this negative image in order to facilitate a Jewish cultural rebirth.

### **3.3 CONCLUSION**

Maxim Biller’s rise as a Jewish writer and public intellectual since the 1980s falls into an era of drastic political change in Western and Eastern Europe, with Germany the paradigmatic site of the transformation. Determined to engage with the vagaries of contemporary Jewish life in this process, my discussion showed that he crafts a new mode of representing the German Jewish voice. The prismatic perspective he adopts illuminates, if not anticipates, a turning point in the self-perception of Jews in the evolving Berlin Republic.

A central feature of his perspective concerns the staging of the present through prior Jewish literary traditions. These traditions had largely been missing in the repertoire of Jewish writers who emerged in the postwar years and who were primarily interested in honoring the Holocaust memory of the survivor generation. Rather than following a scripted pattern of representing of Jewishness, Biller excavates the stereotype of the Oriental Jew, the shtetl, and the Chassidic story. He thus introduces complicated and less savory figures into the

contemporary canon of Jewish characters in the Germany of the late 1980s and '90s.<sup>283</sup> As a result, the trope of Orientalized Jewishness returns as an emancipatory device in Biller. It's his method to break out of what he considers a flawed representational mold. In the capitalist West, this mold failed to accommodate a nuanced and diversified community of German Jews, whereas in the communist East, it barred religion altogether from taking shape. Biller's investment in traditions past is also an investment in the future with the goal to recalibrate Jewishness in the new Germany four decades after WWII.

Anticipating and paralleling the political and geographical opening up of the East with the fall of the wall, Biller opens up those very spaces in literary form. At the same point in time that West Germans must contend with their relatives from East Germany, we find a similar need to face up to the Jewish relative from the Eastern shtetl in Biller – none of which are unproblematic family members.<sup>284</sup> The narrative emplotment of the stereotype and the shtetl geography empowers Biller's readers: it provides access to what had been obscured or squelched within the dominant cultural discourses following WWII or what could only be remembered within a folkloristic tradition of Eastern Jewry.<sup>285</sup> Biller thus launches new possibilities for being Jewish in Germany and beyond. His project of cultural emancipation

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<sup>283</sup> In 1985, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's play *Der Muell, die Stadt und der Tod* marks a dramatic change in the portrayal of Jews in the public sphere in Germany. While Fassbinder, from the position of the dominant culture, puts on stage stereotyped Jewish characters, Biller, from inside the Jewish minority position, works with similar stereotypes. Both artists earn serious criticism for their use of taboo characters in theatrical and literary form.

<sup>284</sup> Coincidentally, the German unification process has been described with the language of the colonial encounter where Eastern Germany becomes "Orientalized" with the collapse of the old division between the capitalist West and communist East.

<sup>285</sup> On an internationally known level, the stories by Isaac Bashevis Singer featuring Jewish life in the pre-WWII Polish shtetl communities exemplify this folkloristic tradition.

paves the way for a Jewish European identity that is limited by neither national, nor linguistic, political, or geographic boundaries.

## **4.0 ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN EAST AND WEST AFTER 1990 IN THE NEW GERMANY**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The new Germany has seen a remarkable resurgence of Jewish life since reunification in 1990, largely as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Empire and the breakup of a world order still structured around the legacies of two world wars. The demise of the Soviet Union and fall of the Iron Curtain opened up borders long sealed and released a wave of migration of Jews from East to West and into Germany. This migratory flow has reinvigorated existing Jewish communities in Germany's urban centers and is particularly noticeable in metropolitan Berlin, where it has produced a visible and palpable Jewish presence.<sup>286</sup> While Jewish life and culture in Germany are thus experiencing a pronounced and welcome period of rejuvenation, the transformation is also marked by many tensions. As the arrival of sizable numbers of Russian Jews changes the composition and face of German Jewry, Jews from varying backgrounds and of different generations compete in the negotiations to define modes of being Jewish in Germany today. "The issue of authenticity" (Peck 53), and its underlying question of identity for Jews in

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<sup>286</sup> The migration pattern is documented in the work of Jeffrey Peck, Y. Michal Bodemann, and Sander Gilman.



Germany, emerges as a core point of contention between the Jewish Community, the official arbiter controlling Jewish religious life, and these immigrants.<sup>287</sup> Their conflicting place- and space-making efforts have received sustained scholarly attention<sup>288</sup> and continue to leave traces in cultural texts and the representational strategies employed by these German Jews to imagine and discover a variety of positions from which to speak.

Specifically, this chapter is concerned with recurring Orientalist tropes in representations of the contemporary German Jewish experience in visual texts that not only reanimate the figure of the Oriental Jew, but also notions of the “Oriental cult” and the old East/West divide already found in Kompert’s and Franzos’ literary texts over a century earlier. My discussion of selected works by the two authors – both of whom happen to share the migration route from East to West with today’s migrant Jews from Russia – demonstrated that they mobilized, adapted, and appropriated tropes from Orientalist and colonialist discourse for their purposes of Jewish emancipation and modernization. In fact, their Orientalisms helped delineate the negative contours of the Eastern Jew and his living space in the minds of their mostly Western readership and informed their project of framing modern German Jewish identity.

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<sup>287</sup> Jeffrey Peck’s anthropological study *Being Jewish in the New Germany*, from 2006, discusses the fundamental differences in identificatory expectations between Germany’s established Jewish community and the immigrants. He argues that “these Jewish immigrants had to assume a German-Jewish narrative of Holocaust victimhood and Soviet anti-Semitism that didn’t necessarily belong to them in order to be accepted as Jews and be integrated into their new lives.”

<sup>288</sup> These scholars hail from various academic fields, such as sociology, literary studies, anthropology, and history, and include Jeffrey Peck, Karen Remmler, Sander Gilman, Y. Michal Bodemann, Dan Diner, John Borneman, Jack Zipes, Micha Brumlik, Stephan Braese, Teri Ginsberg, Cary Nathenson, Ruth A. Starkman, and Ruth Gruber.

The implication that Jews in Germany today are tapping into the archive of the Orientalist imagination in their own struggle to reconfigure and realign their identificatory framework is surprising, if not disconcerting, precisely because the trope of the Oriental Jew and his traditions only threatens to reprise the stigma and negative cultural stereotype inscribed in them. Considering the currency these figures have gained recently in cultural texts,<sup>289</sup> a set of questions discussing and comparing the function of Orientalisms in the construction of modern Jewish identity past and present imposes itself: do these representational strategies fall into the category of “postcolonial Orientalism,” or, perhaps quite to the contrary, into the category of “postcolonial deconstruction” of still readily available Orientalisms? Thus, do they reproduce the negative meaning of the stereotype to stoke reified forms of knowledge and foster anti-Semitic sentiments, as some scholars believe, or do they realize a postcolonial potential in suspending and undermining embedded meanings? How can we read such symbolic practices within the context of the public discourses that shape perceptions of Jews in Germany and also Jewish self-perceptions? What do they mean in terms of continuity and rupture of the German Jewish experience? How does the specificity of the historical moment in Germany bear on their reading? Lastly, what kind of narratives emerge, and to what overall effect?

If for Kompert and Franzos literary narratives provided new models for subjecthood, the cinematic narratives of the present are an important medium by which to explore the different positions of enunciation they make available for the Jewish minority. Although both literature and film work with similar narratives, they don’t operate with the same representational tools when mediating their interpretation of the world and translating images previously known – for

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<sup>289</sup> Other than in the filmic and literary texts, the figure of the Oriental Jew is also visible in pop cultural texts; for example, in comedic performances or at Jewish-themed party events like those described in Mareike Albers’ “Unkosher Jewish,” or in Jeffrey Peck’s work.

example, from the pages of a book – onto the screen. Importantly, filmic narratives create, through powerful visual images, a generally more complete sensory experience that is readily accessible to a far wider audience than in the case of literature and therefore have the capacity to challenge the cognitive responses of the public at large. With regards to representations of Jewishness on screen in Germany, I argue, sensitivities are particularly heightened, and artifacts usually are under strict public scrutiny, doubtlessly making the return of the “Ostjude” (“Eastern Jew”) and his stigmatized traditions a challenging proposal. The two films I’ll analyze in this chapter stand out as excellent examples for observing the use of Orientalist tropes and exploring their function in negotiating a changing, lived reality for Germany’s new Jewry. While the films adopt that “set of representative figures” that Said (71) locates at the heart of Orientalist discourse, my intention is to demonstrate how these figures serve to reimagine Jewish subjectivity and make aspects of the Jewish past experience newly productive and meaningful for the lives of these German Jews today.

I will first analyze the comedy *Alles auf Zucker*, from 2005, directed by Dani Levy, then discuss the German TV feature film *So ein Schlamassel*, from 2010, which was written and produced by Alice Brauner. Both productions fit the category of Jewish self-representations: Dani Levy is a Swiss-Jewish filmmaker based in Berlin; and Alice Brauner is the daughter of German-Jewish film producer Artur Brauner. Levy and Brauner belong to the so-called “second,” if not “third” postwar generation, which grew up during the era of the divided Germanies and witnessed their yoking in the “new Germany” – the locus for their narratives. Their works couple humor and comedy with Jewish concerns, mirroring (and setting) trends in cultural discourse that speak to the needs of their generation. There are certainly many aspects in these films that invite attention; however, I am most interested in the situatedness of the films

in those cultural discourses and the apparent tension in “the relationship between the word and the world” (Appadurai 51) that the films embody, i.e.: the tension arising from the contrast in aesthetic and cultural alterity. As these films experiment with a representational vocabulary unfamiliar in the context of the Jewish subject matter in Germany, they contest or infringe upon “authorized” and established practices of the public representation of Jews, making it necessary to restate here the boldness of their project. It is of further note that this shift in vocabulary and imagery not only accompanies generational shifts, but also lends a fresh tone to the discourses implicated in the production and circulation of the images under consideration here.

Before I engage with the films proper, it is necessary to summarize the trajectory of the discourses encoding the shifting sensibilities and providing the context for current filmic texts. Without a doubt, the reference point for any discussion of things Jewish has long been the Holocaust and the shadow it cast, not least upon the lives of those Jews who had remained in Germany. In many ways, the notion of the “paradoxes of Jewish existence in Germany” that Bodemann cites in his 1996 publication *Jews, Germans, Memory*, resonates throughout the literary works of German Jewish writers and in public discussions of the presumed unfeasibility of a return of Jews to Germany. Particularly, writers from the so-called “first” and “second generations,” like Barbara Honigmann, Jurek Becker, Esther Dischereith, Lea Fleischmann, and Gila Lustiger, are caught up in navigating their personal histories at the intersection with German national and cultural histories from a location that emphasizes the problem of being Jewish in Germany. Numerous films and documentaries operate on the same premise. They

thematize related conflicts in their stories, often referencing the legacy of the Holocaust.<sup>290</sup> The critical and at times defeatist stance that characterizes these works coincides with the withdrawal of Jews into the private sphere and the failure on behalf of the German public sphere to effectively confront the past during the 1950s and into the '70s. However, several events in the political and cultural arena in the 1980s have become benchmarks of a shift in attitude and efforts on behalf of the dominant culture against what has been termed "Holocaust amnesia," even if those efforts have been tempered by the "normalization" debate.<sup>291</sup> Nevertheless, prompted by a more open and broader engagement with the past, Jews have been projecting a greater presence in the public sphere ever since, and show their investment in public discussions. Importantly for my argument, a pivotal point is the influx of Jewish immigrants following unification and the way their presence gives shape to the "new German Jewry" (Bodemann NJ) and contemporary Jewish reality in Germany. As Jews have become increasingly involved on the cultural terrain and leave their mark on popular culture,<sup>292</sup> non-Jewish Germans provide the "Judaizing milieu" in the form of the "sizable markets and audiences" Bodemann (NJ 6) deems necessary for a sustainable Jewish environment. In light of this current fascination with Jewish traditions and religion, Jews are inspired to probe into alternative identifications, I argue, drawing on the Orientalist aesthetics as a gateway into the

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<sup>290</sup> More recent filmic examples are Jordan Bahat's *Jealous of the Birds* (2011), Katinka Zeuner and Benjamin Laser's *Jalda and Anna – First Generation After the Shoa*, or Thomas Brasch and Jurek Becker's *Der Passagier – Welcome to Germany* (1988).

<sup>291</sup> Stuart Taberner discusses the "normalization" debate in his anthology, *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*. Jeffrey Peck summarizes the benchmarking events from cultural discourse, e.g., the Holocaust TV mini-series from 1978, President Reagan's Bitburg visit in 1985, the Fassbinder Affair from the same year, the Historians' Debate from 1986, and the fall of the Wall in 1989.

<sup>292</sup> Jeffrey Peck gives a detailed description of the many facets of living Jewish culture in Germany with examples of klezmer music, Israeli cuisine, kosher grocery stores, Jewish theater, and the revival of Yiddish.

Jewish past beyond the Holocaust and as a compass to find their place as German Jews in the present.

#### **4.2 DANY LEVY’S “ALLES AUF ZUCKER,” OR PLAYING WITH THE ORIENTALIST AESTHETIC**

“Unter der Oberfläche bestand offenbar das Bedürfnis . . . sich mit der Vergangenheit auf eine neue Art zu beschäftigen, einer, die befreit, entspannt und erlöst”<sup>293</sup>  
Dani Levy (Bleuler 71)

When Dani Levy’s film *Alles auf Zucker* came to the theaters in Germany in 2005, the “unorthodox comedy” (Derek 26) received an enthusiastic welcome from large audiences and quickly became one of the country’s most popular film productions of the year. This is not surprising, given the film’s charm, wit, and good-natured humor, which easily appeal to many viewers. However, what makes Levy’s picture stand out and deserving of the label “unorthodox” is an entirely different concern. The movie owes its popularity on the German market to the unconventional and original treatment of a subject matter generally neither considered suitable for comedic material nor available for humoristic adaptations in the German context. After all, it explores contemporary Jewish life in Germany from the perspective of commonplace everyday reality and through a film genre that privileges social reconciliation and happy endings. The two features had previously seemed difficult to imagine and were considered incompatible with the conventions and viewer expectations regulating practices of

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<sup>293</sup> “Beneath the surface there was apparently a desire ... to engage the past in new ways, in a way that liberates, relaxes and redeems.”

representation of Jews and Germans in the decades after WWII. Not unexpectedly then, popular reviews headline the film as a “taboo-breaker,” crediting it for producing “a politically unprecedented event: Germans . . . laughing at – but also with – Jews” (Spiegel 2005).

This emphasis on the film’s humor and its trailblazing effects needs qualifying. Its reputation and reception, my study demonstrates, can be traced to two aspects. For one, *Alles auf Zucker* introduces a Jewish presence to German consciousness that contradicts what the majority of non-Jewish Germans know about Jews in Germany. Notwithstanding the emergence of a “Judaizing milieu” (Bodemann) and a growing market for things Jewish, for the majority of the population, encounters with Jews primarily take the form of looking at museum exhibits or watching documentaries and filmic fictions of the Jewish Holocaust experience. This circumstance not only reserves a discrete space for Jews outside of Germans’ everyday lives, but it is one curated around the themes of death and trauma. Moreover, being Jewish in Germany had remained largely a private matter after the war and outside of the public’s eye, despite the fact that small Jewish communities continued to exist throughout the postwar period, especially in the larger cities. Tellingly, Jack Zipes (18) comments that “living Jews tended to be ignored” in the postwar years; according to Matthias Uecker (25), they were “either ignored or sidelined.” Rather than showing overt signs of Jewishness in public, Jews reserved them for the private space in an act of withdrawal.<sup>294</sup> The resulting lack of signs of palpable Jewishness, I contend, has often been conflated with the notion of the absence of Jews in Germany. Insofar as absence implies also non-existence and fails to acknowledge the presence of those who stayed

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<sup>294</sup> East German writer Barbara Honigmann, for example, mourned the lack of opportunity to openly share cultural and religious practices in her native East Germany, in East Berlin, and decided to emigrate to join the Orthodox Jewish community in Strasbourg in the early 1980s.

on or have chosen to live in Germany, it would be more appropriate to speak of the *invisibility* of German Jews, or, to quote from Sander Gilman, of their “visible invisibility.” But now this state of invisibility is changing into a state of greater visibility, where Jewishness is taken out of the private realm and exhibited on the public stage in a variety of venues. *Alles auf Zucker* is an instance of that very trend, perhaps even playing a pioneering role in a corrective development. Thus, in sharp contrast with often sanitized museum displays and the discourse on Jewish victimhood, Levy’s film allows the viewer to glimpse an unfamiliar and underexplored dimension of contemporary German Jewish life, with its focus on Jews living in the here and now.

Secondly, a central aspect of the comedic and taboo-breaking effects concerns the film’s play with the Orientalist aesthetics and stereotypes that could be understood as an exercise in “self-Orientalization” and thus prove the lasting internalization of discursively transmitted prejudice against the West’s Other, in the sense of Said’s “latent Orientalism.” Alternatively, it might suggest that attendant tropes can still be mobilized at any time, for better or for worse. Said (325), for example, already warned that Orientalisms continue to govern the Western imagination and are transported via global cultural flows to all parts of the world, leading him to observe that “the modern Orient, in short, participates in its own Orientalizing.”<sup>295</sup> Given that the Orientalist tropes used to conceptualize Jewish otherness in the past are an abiding focus in *Alles auf Zucker* and are the structuring principle for the plot, the reading of the film as an allegorical representation of Orientalized Jewishness lies at hand. In fact, for some scholars (Nathenson, Knauss), this use of tropes and stereotypes in Levy’s film is highly problematic, as

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<sup>295</sup> According to Said, the “modern Orient” (to be distinguished from “modern Orientalism”) describes the “Orient” or the East of the “postcolonial” era; he uses the term to refer to the 1970s.



it not only presumably misrepresents Jewish identity, but it also “might serve there toward mitigating anti-Semitism” (Ginsberg 511) – an issue that informs the measured, if not negative, reception of *Alles auf Zucker* in scholarship.<sup>296</sup>

However, Said’s (24) claim that his study of Orientalism “offers a marvelous instance of the interrelations between society, history, and textuality” also reminds us to pay attention to the particularities of the historical moment, the discursive context, and the nature of the text in analyzing the workings of Orientalisms in the artifact. As such, meaning depends on its embeddedness in discursive formations that are always historically specific, yet overlap and intersect in peculiar and unforeseen ways. With this in mind, my study argues, there is a closely drawn link between the contemporary German cultural context and the Orientalisms Levy teases and instrumentalizes throughout the film. While the global cultural flows Said blames for the continued diffusion and internalization of Orientalisms may indeed have stimulated the resurfacing of Orientalist tropes in *Alles auf Zucker*, their function and authority rather relies on factors that are specific to each locale and moment, and therefore differ accordingly. Understanding the taboo-breaking humor as an expression of the mood of a younger generation of German Jews and the film as the aesthetic execution of both tells us much about why *Alles auf Zucker* formulates an “unorthodox” representation of Jewish life in Germany. Instead of following the inherited script of narrating a predictable German Jewish postwar story, Levy’s film breaks out of scripted versions on the topic to do justice to the vicissitudes of being Jewish in the present. Thus, he enacts his own account of what contemporary German-Jewish life might

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<sup>296</sup> Following the film’s debut, a spirited debate ensued on the WiG listserve about several aspects of the film, particularly the function of humor and “the in/significance of Palestinian representation in the film and the ir/relevance of that to the publicity the film had received . . .” (Ginsberg 508).

look like when he takes the experience and memory of one individual as his point of departure to weave into his private story “Jewish” and “German” discourses.

The opening scene introduces the first-person narrator and main character, Jaecki Zucker – or more correctly Jakob Zuckermann – who recalls the previous week’s tumultuous events from his deathbed at the hospital. As the narration becomes anchored in Zucker’s personal memories of his most recent past and seemingly final week of life, we learn through Jaecki’s eyes about the longstanding conflict between him and his brother that has left the two estranged and alienated from each other for decades. At the heart of their rift lies the question of where to settle when the cold war controversy after WWII challenges their allegiances.<sup>297</sup> Both decide to stay in Germany, but, for ideological reasons, each brother chooses a different Germany: Jaecki, committed to the socialist cause and “aus politischen Gründen nicht religiös,” stays in the East, in Berlin, whereas his mother, Rebekkah, and his brother move to the West, to Frankfurt, to pursue business opportunities. The political East/West division of the country is mirrored in the ideological and, more specifically, the religious-cultural division of the brothers. Their estrangement continues even after German reunification voids old borders, and which prevents them from a possible rapprochement. Only after the mother dies are the brothers and respective families forced to come together again: to open the testament and fulfill her last wish, and, as a result of their encounter, to deal with their differences.

While paralleling the stock plot known from the myriad of filmic and literary adaptations commonly used to describe the antagonistic tensions afflicting Jews at home in Germany and struggling with their self-understanding as Jews living, in Maxim Biller’s words,

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<sup>297</sup> This particular question guided the path of other Jews after the war and can be found in the works by Jurek Becker and Barbara Honigman, to name a few.

in the “Land der Täter und Verräter” (land of the perpetrators and traitors), the underlying structure becomes immediately challenged when unfamiliar aspects of the contemporary Jewish experience trump expected concerns. Instead of the anticipated deep inner crisis of the Jewish protagonist, we witness the mundane and temporary crisis of a man coping with quotidian problems: money; family feuds; and differences over lifestyle. This surprising take on lived Jewish experience is supported by the imagery borrowed from the Orientalist imagination and applied in the depiction of the families. Not only does it serve to inject thrust and meaning into an otherwise potentially worn and depressing tale, but also as the vector through which I see the postcolonial potential of the filmic project.

Thus, considering the voices of those critics troubled by the use of a taboo-breaking vocabulary of representation, I wish to rectify their assessment by examining how Orientalist tropes, including the figure of the Oriental Jew, the East/West binary geography, and the performance of Jewishness, become empowering tools under Levy’s cinematographic craftsmanship. This inquiry demonstrates that the Orientalist archive allows Germany’s new Jewry to both gain agency over, and achieve authorship of, the Jewish narrative of the present.

#### **4.2.1 The Oriental Jew and his 21<sup>st</sup> Century Avatars**

Instantiating one important facet of the film’s aesthetic premise is the trope of the Oriental Jew – a figure with a long history in representations of Jewishness that calls for reinspection, given its prominent and surprising visual reenactment in *Alles auf Zucker* after decades of absence. This absence of the visual sign accompanied the aforementioned “invisibility” of German Jews, and can be easily explained: for one, in the past, German Jews imagined their own emancipation as Westernization and in opposition to notions of the despised Eastern Jew, as in Kompert and

Franzos. Secondly, in the imagination of the non-Jewish dominant population, this very figure epitomized the antithetical counterpart of the German, and embodied the ultimate Other. These practices on both sides produced the theses of the Oriental Jew's inferiority, backwardness, and inequality, and, importantly, informed racial discourses during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, the figure was congealed in the negative cultural stereotype, and performed cultural and ideological labor for various historical actors at different times. In its perhaps most notorious manifestation, the stereotype of the Oriental Jew served to promote the political agenda of the Nazi regime and was exploited not only rhetorically, but also visually in Nazi propaganda.<sup>298</sup>

Keeping this highly problematic function of the stereotype in Germany's fairly recent past in mind, we could neither invoke the image of the Oriental Jew – other than in the context of publicly “sanctioned” Holocaust discourse – nor could we have it correspond to the image that postwar German Jews had cultivated in lived reality. In fact, the face of the Oriental Jew had largely been absent in Germany even prior to the Holocaust on account of the successes of Jewish acculturation and assimilation into German culture, even though the stereotype circulated widely in racial discourse. German and Austrian Jewry had been the driving forces behind the reform movement of Judaism and the push for a secular Jewish culture during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when there was little tolerance for the kind of visual signifiers of Jewishness that would prompt associations with the loathed Eastern Jew. As Amos Elon (289) put it with regards to the emerging Zionist movement at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany and its appeal for the recently arrived Jews from Eastern Europe: “the terms Ostjude and Zionist were considered interchangeable; both were ‘socially unacceptable.’”

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<sup>298</sup> Visual propaganda material includes posters, book illustrations, films, caricaturistic artwork, etc.

Considering the complex history of the role into which the Oriental Jew had been drafted in the German cultural sphere, Levy experienced firsthand the anxieties his project stirred when the German television establishment and film companies alike initially refused to back the proposed film. In an interview in 2005, Levy admits that “die politische Brisanz wurde mir erst bewusst, als *Alles auf Zucker!* so lange überall abgelehnt wurde und für die Finanzierung keinen Fernsehsender fand. Ich merkte erst, wie heikel dieses Thema ist, als etliche Leute das Drehbuch kritisch und fast verachtend aus der Hand gelegt hatten”<sup>299</sup> (Spiegel 71) If it took him some time to find the support and resources to get the film underway, then Levy still had to get the finished product to pass muster with the German Jewish Community as the official voice of the Jewish minority. In Levy’s words, “unter Umständen hätte eine radikale Stimme aus der jüdischen Gemeinde gereicht, um den Film zu diskreditieren. Er hätte plötzlich einen falschen Ruf gekriegt, und man wäre dann plötzlich nicht mehr in diesen ‘Antisemiten-Film’ gegangen”<sup>300</sup> (Breuer 70). Fortunately for Levy, “Paul Spiegel, the head of the German Jewish community, has hailed the film, saying it is exactly what German Jews need” (Spiegel-online) – a verdict that helped launch the film’s success.

The reluctance to endorse a German-Jewish comedy points to the larger problem of the representation of Jews and the visual lapse the un-representability of the Oriental Jew, at least in Germany, implies. Reduced to the negative stereotype, the figure’s telling absence condensed the identificatory framework for German Jewry in the postwar years. It denied the community a

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<sup>299</sup> “I only became aware of the political force of the film when *Alles auf Zucker* was rejected for so long from all sides and I couldn’t find a station willing to finance the project. I realized the difficulty of the topic when several people put down the script with disdain”

<sup>300</sup> “Conceivably, a single radical voice from the Jewish Community would have been enough to discredit the film. It would have had the wrong reputation and no one would have gone to see this ‘anti-Semitic’ film”

full range of play with ‘inter-Jewish’ difference – the kind of heterogeneity and plurality that characterizes communities elsewhere.<sup>301</sup> Levy’s film can be understood to reanimate the Oriental Jew for the German context and to quite consciously bring him back as the incarnation of the stereotype, lending depth and profile to Jewishness, as well as diversifying the range of Jewish types. Thus, the film’s aesthetic image reads like a contemporary Oriental genre tableau: it adds visual expression to the mysteriousness of Jewish life, and is composed to accentuate the Jewish Orient’s presumed sensuality and intense energy, “its strangeness, its difference, its exotic sensuousness” that Said (72) believes define French and British 19<sup>th</sup> century period paintings of the Orient.

While Levy’s arrangement of the genre tableau includes the full spectrum of Oriental characters – including the iconic figure of the belly dancer, as we shall see – I will focus first on discussing the Frankfurt branch of the Zuckerman family as the most conspicuous character ensemble encoding the Orientalist figure. Staged to effect a comedic climax, the Zuckermans’ arrival at Berlin airport is carefully choreographed to counterpose the “invisible” or unmarked German Jewish Zucker family against the Oriental Jew. As Jaecki and his family await the arrival of their long-lost relatives, the camera frames the whole family in a long shot before panning around to adopt their point of view and focus on the empty escalator. Sharing the Zucker’s nervous anticipation, the viewer is caught off guard when the Zuckerman family, grouped together on the escalator, comes into view, making a dramatic entrance: Samuel turns out to be an Orthodox Jew vested in traditional garb and accompanied by his ultra-

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<sup>301</sup> Jewish minorities in other countries, for example, in the United States, France, Belgium, or the Netherlands, are more diverse and therefore offer a different identificatory framework. Vivian Liska and Thomas Nolden, the editors of *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Europe*, feature discussions of Jewish writing in its national context, and offer the opportunity for a comparative approach.

conservatively dressed wife Golda, Hassidic adult son, and Westernly clad adult daughter. Levy makes a daring statement with this foursome. Their appearances call into question what a modern Jewish family looks like today, let alone one from Frankfurt. The 21<sup>st</sup> century German Zuckerman family seems to point not toward the present where we'd suspect a different kind of Jew to be at home, but rather to Kompert and Franzos' 19<sup>th</sup> century shtetl past. Both men are bearded and wear the traditional yarmulke, hat, dress pants, and kaftan-like overcoat, and Samuel's wife Golda wears a wig as the female version of head covering. Yet, it is Joshua, the younger male, whose embodied strangeness is meaningfully amplified by his religious fervor. Not only does he sport the requisite *payot*, or side hair curls, but he's also wrapped in a *tallit*, or prayer shawl, to obey the strict prayer and grooming codes of his particular branch of Orthodox Judaism.

His external features of demonstrated Jewishness match his internal devotion to his religion. Several episodic encounters prove his physical appearance to be a telltale sign of his inner world. For example, in an early scene, panicking during a severe thunderstorm, Joshua frantically jumps out of the taxi and takes recourse in Hebrew prayer along a busy Berlin highway. His almost primitive, childlike fear of lightning and nature's power reveals the naïve belief that praying to God can protect him from nature's wrath. Casting Joshua as neither in control of his environment nor of his own self seems a calculated move to force the connection between his pre-modern state of being and Jewishness. The analogy harks back to the presumed incompatibility between nature and culture, which the discourse of modernity had sponsored and which considered nature an obstacle to becoming an emancipated and autonomous human existence. In light of a discourse that historically supplied the logic to discredit the traditional Jewish lifestyle, Joshua's frightened reaction to the bolts of lightning only validates his

supposed developmental immaturity. His desperate pleas to God, in Hebrew, in response to the anxiety nature's forces unleashed in him, expose the kind of irrationality modernity was thought to have conquered, and against which writers like Franzos and Kompert wrote.

In an equally salient scene, Joshua, prayer book in hand and tallit-covered, is engrossed in a swaying movement during Hebrew prayer at the home of his Berlin relatives. His gaze into the camera projects a mixture of intense immersion into the mysticism of prayer and anger for having been disrupted in this ritualized task. More than just seeming overstated, these joint traits spark the thought that he's the stereotype come back to life. It signals the return of the quintessential Oriental Jew, who lived in a world of his own and completely rejected the idea of interaction with the outside world. Bearing a striking resemblance to Franzos' shtetl Jews, Joshua, with his unyielding religious commitment, borders on a fanaticism that leaves him in a condition of mental stasis and closed-mindedness. His detachment from life out there is underscored by his sense of withdrawal and alienation from all others. This isolation also excludes his re-found Berlin family, whom he treats with suspicion and considers "socially unacceptable" in much the same way that German Jews showed their contempt for the traditional "Ostjude" in the past. Such alienation leads Joshua to exhibit a pronounced resistance to change. He's unwilling to make any concessions to accommodate certain practical needs the family voices towards him when negotiating the terms of the mother's will. Not surprisingly, he turns out to be a potential and eventually real obstacle to Jaecki's and, ultimately, the family's betterment, if not (economic) survival. When he's entrusted with the role of the arbiter supreme in judging the two families' observance of the complex rules accompanying the eight-day mourning process for the mother, he's also charged with enforcing tradition and religious laws to the point of jeopardizing Jaecki's livelihood as a pool shark: Jaecki either stays home to sit



shiva with the family to satisfy his mother's wishes and become eligible for the promised inheritance, or he escapes to participate in a high stakes pool competition in the hopes of winning the pot. Of course, the comedy finds a solution to Joshua's stringency and reservations, not only in order to restore harmony and obey the comedic principle, but also to undermine the reductiveness of the stereotype.

Though Samuel and Joshua take on more prominent roles than the two females in the family in embodying Orientalized Jewishness, Golda and her daughter serve to complement Levy's hyperbolized Oriental genre tableau. On one hand, the mother's performance of Jewishness aligns with notions of traditional Jewish motherhood and womanhood and brings gender balance to the picture. On the other hand, the daughter's performance of a nymphomaniac violates the very idea of Jewish femininity. Lily, sex-hungry and without inhibitions, seduces her virgin cousin in the linen closet at the hospital. Rather than conforming to the stereotype of the overbearing, yet devoted, Jewish mother, Lily seems to be modeled after Said's "Oriental woman," whose body suggests "not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sexuality, unlimited desire, [and] deep generative energies" (Said 188). Her presumed lasciviousness meets those very criteria Said claims to typecast the Jewess. Combined, Golda and Lily bring into visual representation the different – and clashing – features ascribed to the trans-historical stereotype of the Oriental and Jewish woman, which these two characters enact in the contemporary German context.

With the Frankfurt Zuckermans occupying just one half of Levy's genre tableau, the Berlin Zucker family provides the characters of the other half. Here, the representation of Germany's new Jewry plays out in the contrast of disparate values of Jewishness: the image of the Eastern Jew from the past; and that of the Western Jew from the present. Through this

representation of the two extreme poles of Jewishness, Levy speaks to the counter pulls within the Jewish community that Jeffrey M. Peck (54) describes, in his anthropological study *Being Jewish in the New Germany* (2006), in terms of the “tensions toward alternative Jewish affiliations, both religious and cultural, which either question or fall outside the rigid system of the Einheitsgemeinde that . . . maintains Orthodox and halakhic standards.”<sup>302</sup> Thus, the contrasting portraits Levy paints of the brothers leave little doubt that Samuel and Jaecki hail from different corners in Germany’s Jewish landscape. Even though they are biological brothers and, by virtue of their maternal lineage, united in their Jewishness, they experience and live their Jewishness in separate ways.

Jaecki, for his part, rescinded his Jewish identity a long time ago. He formalized his commitment to socialist values when he gave up his decidedly Jewish birth name of “Jakob Zuckermann” in favor of the more Western-style, short-form “Jaecki Zucker,” a name better suited to perform his adoptive identity as a popular GDR sports reporter. In the film’s first sequence, Jaecki’s autobiographic introduction shows him in his current condition as a handsome and charismatic, yet slightly worn “Lebenskuenstler”<sup>303</sup>. He vacillates between his “post-Wende” (after the “turn”) professional pursuits as pool-shark, gambler, and manager of a nightclub, and his questionable commitment to his middle-class home life. The tensions between these two disparate worlds create an unstable life, for Jaecki is a familiar figure around town for his stories and creative business practices, yet he’s estranged from his practically minded and hard-working wife, Marlene, and their adult children. A closer look at Jaecki

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<sup>302</sup> Peck (6) points out that the “Einheitsgemeinde” is “primarily Orthodox, with some Liberal congregations, which would be called Conservative in North America.”

<sup>303</sup> Roughly translated, “Lebenskuenstler” describes someone who’s happy-go-lucky, optimistic, not too serious about life and work.

reveals that under the veneer of his Western appearance hides a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the 19<sup>th</sup> century vagabonding Eastern Jewish “Schnorrer.” Franzos (15) described this figure as “eine Erscheinung im Volksleben des Ostens . . . ein freier Mann” and as someone with the urge “aus der Treitmühle seines Lebens ins Freie, aus der platten Wirklichkeit in die Welt des schönen Scheins zu flüchten” in order to provide his services as “Schauspieler, . . . lebendige, zweibeinige Zeitung”<sup>304</sup> in return for sustenance. A liminal figure, regularly crossing the threshold between the gentile and the Jewish world, he’s unique and needed and “so sehr an die eigentümlichen Verhältnisse wie an den Volkscharakter gebunden ist, dass man in aller Welt und Geschichte nichts Gleiches finden koennte”<sup>305</sup> (Franzos 15).

Jaeki seems like a modern-day replica of that character. He, too, is a likeable and colorful entertainer supported by a network of friends and connections, walking a fine line between being a caring family man and a vagrant. While his popularity is owed to his charming personality, Jaeki’s spirited temperament and quintessential Jewish Chutzpah endear him to those around him most. Here, Levy manipulates the stereotype of the “Schnorrer” to propel his comedic plotline. Juggling the competing responsibilities of business, family, and Jewish traditions, Jaeki gets caught up in a series of lies and half lies that bring carnivalesque elements to the film, turning assumptions about identity upside down and putting religious convictions, rituals, and family allegiances to the test. Wearing several different faces, he invents stories, trespasses social and moral borders only to adapt the course of his stories yet again to changing needs. Jaeki’s multiple masquerades are impelled by the obligation to honor his mother’s last

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<sup>304</sup> “a character in the people’s life in the East . . . a free man” “to step out of the grinding routine of life and into freedom, from dull reality into the world of appearances” “as actor, . . . living bi-pedal newspaper”

<sup>305</sup> “so tied to the curious conditions and to the national character of the people, that there’s nothing like it in the whole wide world”

wish of a Jewish burial and the need to meet the material challenges of life – or, put in more abstracted terms, by the perennial tensions between the spiritual and the secular world. Levy calls on the stereotype of the “Schnorrer” as a metaphor for the dividedness of Jewish identity and the difficulty of straddling both worlds unless one is willing to perform acrobatic acts or engage in deceptive behavior. The figure’s liminality expresses this conflict, translating inherent tensions into a mode of being in the world. Already a problem for Franzos’ 19<sup>th</sup> century “Schnorrer,” the issue remains sensitive today and has been a divisive factor in the relations between the Jewish Community and the Russian immigrants. They often feel coerced into assuming a Jewish identity in line with the expectations of the Community – an alignment that at times may only be achieved by way of pretense (Peck 53). Clashing expectations and needs have complicated their integration process and forced the question of how to reconcile the two poles. The answer for these Russian immigrants will become clearer as time passes, yet in Levy’s fictional account, the solution is quite obvious. It becomes possible for Jaeki to navigate the different worlds, albeit only with the help of compromise from both sides.

With all that said, the bigger and overarching question concerns the recycling of Orientalist stereotypes that I argue animates Levy’s filmic project so prominently. Given that the stereotype encapsulates the idea of cultural reductiveness and “represents the formal expression of generalizations” (Mattson 71), Levy brings to the discourse an aspect of Jewishness that can only be understood on the basis of prior knowledge and discourses as negative. It risks recapitulating the metonymic relationship between the Oriental Jew and backwardness, because of the unavailability or inability of this figure in the past to engender positive identifications. Rather than recalling the assimilated German Jew, Levy chooses to depict the traditional Jew from the past and thus “a particular strand of Jewish life that had been

wiped out by the Nazis” (Peck) and that, even prior to the genocide, had been written out of Western consciousness during the 19<sup>th</sup> century acculturation process.

Incorporating these outlandish and temporally displaced figures into the contemporary German landscape without injuring their integrity and otherness is a challenging proposition. In this vein, Matthias Uecker (42) has pointed out the need for “alternative strategies of identifying” Jews in cinematic representations “while at the same time denying any assumption of ‘otherness’ that might be construed as anti-Semitic.” Meanwhile, Joshua’s character has been read through the lens of the anti-Semitic paradigm. Terri Ginsberg (511), for example, laments the objectionable invocation of the stereotype in Levy, which she believes to “to mystify the social coordinates and functioning of German racism.” To be fair, the Zuckermans stand in for a cultural category that had been missing in Germany and that is being reconstructed in quite unequivocal terms to accentuate radical otherness. However, the family’s theatrical distinctiveness, I believe, also becomes a means to disrupt the fixed quality of the stereotype and undercut its structure. Here, I find useful Michelle Mattson’s approach to understanding the use of stereotypes in minor literature. She draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s description of minor literatures and their concept of deterritorialization to argue that “in minor literature the distance of the speaker from the cliché or stereotype is different. The stereotype is deterritorialized: it no longer completely overlaps with the original trope” (Mattson 71). Whereas for Mattson (70) this aspect primarily destabilizes the dominant language, in *Alles auf Zucker*, I believe, the stereotype is a visual vehicle with which to reach the dominant culture. It leads to a dialogue with the dominant culture, but also to discussions within the minority culture. It operates in two ways, sparking the revision of a historical stereotype and offering the opportunity for Jewish introspection on the other hand.

Joshua is perhaps the example best suited to demonstrate the ambiguities that undermine the workings of the stereotype. On one hand, his embodied difference seems to conform to Said's (207) characterization of the Oriental as "backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded." As a case in point, then, he, the arbiter of religious practice, is the biggest obstacle in Jaecki's quest to resolve his conflict between being a dutiful Jew and being in the world. Arguably, Joshua's character is inspired by "Jewish" discourses in the new Germany and functions as a metaphor for the Jewish Community and its rigidity in interpreting Jewish identity and membership. Peck's (55) observation that the tradition-oriented and predominantly Orthodox German-Jewish organizations are engaged in a battle with the World Union of Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) over "the issue [of] who speaks for Jews in Germany," and thus over controlling the definition and authenticity of Jewishness, supports my reading of Joshua.<sup>306</sup> In this sense, Joshua's character is informed by the negative traits inscribed in the stereotype and maintains the linearity and invariability Said attributes to the trope.

Yet *Alles auf Zucker* also invites a more generous reading of Joshua, where the stereotype is made newly meaningful with the reintroduction of the play of difference. Despite the fact that Joshua's character type is troubling, it is also a productive tropic device that exposes the performative constitution of identity for contemporary Jewishness. Rather than subscribing to a mimetic style of representation, Levy favors hyperbole to resist a literal interpretation of Joshua's type. By appropriating the stereotype and honing in on its reductive traits within the conventions of film comedy, Levy both deconstructs the trope and

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<sup>306</sup> Peck (55) mentions that "Reform Judaism is trying to reestablish itself in the country of its founding" and that this organization and the Central Council of Jews in Germany "vie, so to speak, for the souls of these immigrant Jews, as well as for money from the German government" (Peck 54).

recontextualizes it to ultimately unmask Joshua's Jewish identity as a performance. In fact, Jana's comment to Joshua that "das ist eine blöde Rolle; die steht dir doch überhaupt nicht"<sup>307</sup> leaves little doubt about Levy's operation. As the story goes, Joshua comes with a history where he played a role different from the Hassid, and the film's ending promises yet another role for him when he connects with the daughter he never knew he had with Jana and accepts her and her radical otherness into his own life. We find out that neither he, nor anyone else for that matter, is immune to ruptures and fragmentation. All the Jewish characters experience personal growth and are plagued by those very foibles we all share. Their ability to change demonstrates that no one is as one-dimensional as the stereotype would like to suggest, holding out the very "possibility of development, transformation, human movement" that Said (208) considers to be denied to the Oriental. In Joshua's case, this prospect takes shape with reference to the young daughter. Her decidedly secular upbringing and her paternal Jewish lineage (as opposed to maternal) challenge rules determining Jewishness. Yet, this issue that fades into the background when Joshua strikes up a fatherly relationship with his daughter and invites her to come with him to Frankfurt, thus gesturing towards the possibility of patrilineal heredity.<sup>308</sup>

At the semiotic level, Levy's maneuver signals the stereotype's deterritorialization in Mattson's sense: "the minor author marks those clichés and stereotypes as unnatural" and thus estranges them (Mattson 71). Through their emplotment in the German context of today, Levy adds historical perspective and counters notions of the stereotype's presumed immutability. By consequence, Said's Oriental genre tableau, predicated on the reification of his subjects, I conclude, is offset by Levy's vibrant narrative display and vision of a diversified cast of

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<sup>307</sup> "this is a stupid role; it doesn't fit you"

<sup>308</sup> According to halakhic laws, Jewishness is based on maternal lineage alone; paternal lineage is not recognized.

characters. His vision gives dimensionality and complexity to the tableau and transforms it into a performative site from which to allegorize Germany's new Jewry. In this sense, *Alles auf Zucker* is about staging the present by means of redeploying the Orientalist archive in a newly constituted genre tableau. The diversity found in the film provides a visual image of "these 'German' Jews . . . [who] represent a coalition of individuals from a wide range of traditions," to use Sander Gilman's (2) description of Jews in Germany in the 1990s. It further echoes Peck's (3) assessment that "Jews, as well as others . . . publicly demonstrate their difference in language, clothes, or symbols on the street" in Berlin today and reveal "their different ways of being Jewish, from Reform to Orthodox" (Peck 59). Peck's observations from real life scenes in the German capital seem to find their correspondence in the film's fictional adaptation. Whereas the former reports about a trend he locates in Germany's cosmopolitan center of Berlin, outside of the lived experience of the majority of Germans, the latter frames that trend in narrative form for all Germans to see, regardless of where they are located.

Thus, the film provides a point of entry into different guises of Jewishness and introduces a plethora of voices of Jews living as Germans at home in Germany. Accordingly, Joshua is embedded in a narrative that introduces a full range of nuanced Jewish types imaginable today: from Hassidic, Orthodox, and secular, to Jaecki's half-Jewish (and homosexual) offspring, and even Marlene's loose affiliation as non-Jewish spouse. The familial framework finds its extension in the Jewish community we glimpse on screen, which provides the context for understanding the Zuckerman/Zucker clan as a whole. Representing an entire community of Jews held together by their religious beliefs during Shabbat services at temple, the two families become representative of, and integrated in, larger Jewish communal structures in Germany. Not only does Levy fill a void with a seemingly vibrant and distinct Jewish



presence to work against the pessimistic assessments of earlier generations mourning the absence of community (Hongimann, Bodeman), but he also makes a serious political investment when he suggests that German Jewish identity is a staging of the self at different times and within specific discursive formations. In this vein, *Alles auf Zucker* brings awareness to the needs of Germany's new Jewry and the stakes of nominating alternate iterations of self for these Jews. As a result of the film's engagement with Orientalized Jewishness, Levy innovates the modes of representation of Jews in Germany and facilitates identifications outside of normative ascriptions of identity.

#### **4.2.2 Where's the East and Where's the West: Negotiating Jewish Place and Space**

“But, where, indeed, does the West begin? In Posen? In Berlin? Or in the Netherlands?”  
(Weissberg on Maimon and his migratory path - Weissberg 112)

The experiment at restructuring identifications for Germany's new Jewry through the Orientalist aesthetics gains thrust and meaning through the film's geographic aesthetics and narrative location of Berlin. The spatial coordinates of the city constitute a formal feature of the plot. They are saturated with symbolic significance on account of Berlin's role in both German and Jewish modern history, making it a suitable metaphor for their intertwined relationship. Located at the crossroads of Europe's West and Europe's East, Berlin, like no other geographical place in Germany, has been historically significant, and is yet endowed with symbolic meaning. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries it became the hub of the rising power called Prussia, as well as of the German Enlightenment and the lived experience of multi-cultural tolerance. Later, Berlin was named the capital of the German Empire under Wilhelm and became a leading cultural center in Europe equal in status to that of Paris. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the city gained

notoriety as an exhibition site of Nazi power and eventually as the staging ground of Hitler's bellicose ventures in Europe and beyond. In the postwar decades, Berlin epitomized Germany and Europe's polarized division into East and West. Most recently, it has become the icon of German reunification and European integration efforts, as well as an important symbol of Europe's new Jewish diaspora.<sup>309</sup>

In the Jewish past, metropolitan and cosmopolitan Berlin was the primary locus of Jewish transformation and modernization, and was appreciated for stimulating new modes of being for Jews. Over the course of the Jewish Haskalah (enlightenment) movement, many Jews followed the path of cultural and religious reform modeled by Moses Mendelsohn, whose "passage from Dessau to Berlin was as through a time machine, a journey across centuries, from the hermetic insularity of the medieval ghetto . . . to the relative enlightenment of eighteenth-century Berlin" (Elon 3). For Salomon Maimon in 1792, for example, the city "seemed very much like a promised land" (Weissberg 108), where he could engage in "therapeutic self-improvement" (Weissberg 110) in order to overcome "the Eastern-Jewish wilderness." To be sure, not all of the Jews walking in Mendelsohn and Maimon's footsteps shared the same objectives, although they all looked to modernize. Modernization, however, could mean different things to different people. Florian Mendes-Flohr (5-6) stresses the "uneven pattern of Jewish modernization," adding that "the transformations in traditional Jewish life occurred in a comprehensive way among the Jews of the Germanic lands first and in a particularly intense manner."

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<sup>309</sup> Thomas Nolden and Vivian Liska (xxvii), in *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Europe*, discuss Jewish writing in terms of "discovering more broadly the cultural productivity and 'imaginary plentitude' (Hall 1990,236) of the European Diaspora of Jewish letters."

The historical experience tells us that for many, Berlin exemplified the lure of the West and all it had to offer, and became the model home to German Jewry. Jonathan Hess (19) describes German Jewry as “paradigmatic of the Jewish modernization process in general” and the leading role they assumed in forging the modern tradition of Reform Jewry.<sup>310</sup> The dramatic turn of history under the Nazis ended the era of Berlin’s status in the Jewish experiment of secularization, only to turn the city into a placeholder for what Adorno and Horkheimer termed “the limits of enlightenment.” While this idea of the limit encapsulates philosophical concerns about the origins and legacy of enlightenment thought, it’s a descriptor that also speaks to Berlin’s history more generally. In particular, the concept of the border in its multi-meaning applications is intimately tied up with this city and attests to its function not only as a divided and dividing space, but also as a site inviting the transgression of borders for the various actors it houses.

On one hand, the topos of the East/West divide that accompanied so prominently the Jewish cultural and political emancipation process since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and until the rise of Nazism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century regained momentum during the unification process of East and West Germany in the ‘90s, and has been a determining factor in negotiating its terms since. Paralleling the hierarchies and cleavages of the discourse of Jewish modernization, Germany’s post-unification debates invoke a longstanding pattern of constructing Western civilizational and cultural superiority in relation to Eastern inferiority and backwardness.<sup>311</sup> If 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>310</sup> While German Jewry became synonymous with Reform Judaism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Peck (55) notes that after WWII, this tradition gained greater traction in the United States than in postwar Germany. Also, the first female rabbi, Regina Jonas, was ordained in Berlin.

<sup>311</sup> Ever since reunification, public debate has grappled with the social and economic cost of integrating the two former Germanies; along the way, it has brought to light the profound cultural bias felt on either side of the former Iron Curtain, a bias which Andreas Glaeser, in his

German-Jewish subject formation was posed within the logic of the polarizing East-West paradigm, then a similarly Manichean constellation governs Germany's unification discourse positing a "fundamental asymmetry" (Glaeser 7) between the East and the West. This very reunification rhetoric becomes a means to discuss the inner-Jewish differences characterizing Germany's new Jewry. Levy's film, I contend, capitalizes on the transference of the cultural bias against the old "wild East" and *Halbasien* from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to Germany's very own internal East at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In fact, the analogy imposes itself with the appearance on the scene of Jews divided by their Eastern and Western orientation respectively: the Oriental Jew and the modern Jew. In this sense then, the film seems to call attention to what Cary Nathenson (Ginsberg 509) terms an "allegory of German reunification . . . [that means] a shifting of the burden of creating German normalcy onto the group whose victimization is the biggest obstacle to that normalcy" in Levy's film. Yet, Nathenson seems to overlook an important point. In framing the brothers' division within the immediate Holocaust legacy and in adopting the discourse of the "victim," he fails to do justice to the relevance of the topos of the divide in German Jewish history and how that history transpires in the present in new ways. By contrast, I wish to show how, per Levy's suggestion, the geographic and cultural binaries and Berlin's role as a locus of encounter and exchange are made productive in the discourse of Germany's new Jewry today. Rather than

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ethnographic study *Divided in Unity* (2000), proves to be a determining factor for the survival of the "mental walls" in the heads of people. Although the tensions and mutual suspicions he examines address the problematic need of filling a gap that had opened during decades of political and ideological separation, West German cultural conceit before and after the *Wende* has been feeding notions of "a fundamental asymmetry" between the two Germanies (Glaser 7) that Glaser considers inscribed in German unification itself.

examining Berlin in terms of production site for a uniquely “German” space, I will focus on the interplay between the geographic aesthetics and the production of a “Jewish” space instead.

Considering the historical and current weight of Berlin in German and Jewish history as a central transfer zone, the city is more than a mere backdrop for the narrative. It’s a place qualified by the different historical moments that gave it shape in the past and that bear on those making the city the point of reference for identifications in the present. Andreas Glaeser’s (88) work, for example, helps explain the connection between selves and space. He posits the “recognition that identities have a spatial dimension” based on the rhetorical reading and writing of space through narrative. His study considers space to be “the stage *for* performance [and also] . . . performance itself” (Glaeser 71), and to be always anchored in history. In the case of Berlin, this means that the city provides an important framework for identifications both individual and collective. Consequently, it cannot be dissociated from the process of negotiating identities on its terrain. Not surprisingly then, contemporary Berlin plays a vital role in that process for Germans and Jews. For instance, Glaeser argues the importance and consequences of the loss of locations in (East) Berlin due to destruction or reconstruction projects after the *Wende* for Eastern Germans. Alina Gromova’s (73) anthropological study discusses how the spatial configurations particular to Berlin and the specifics of the city’s divided history are important factors in identifications for young Eastern Jewish immigrants.<sup>312</sup> Her work emphasizes the triangular interaction between space, memory, and identifications, claiming the dialectical processes of “people-making” and “place-making” – two practices that go hand in hand. For the purpose of my argument, I will address three aspects of Berlin’s symbolic

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<sup>312</sup> Gromova’s study from 2012 looks at the interaction of Jewish identity and the Berlin urban space.

geography to examine how for Levy the Berlin locale is an important touchstone in the open-ended process of identity formation and the production of space for Germany's new Jewry.

Firstly, in *Alles auf Zucker*, the East-West border metaphor inscribed in the city space is matched by the cultural and ideological (mis)alignment of the Zuckerman and Zucker families. Their differences both embody and are embodied in Berlin's symbolic geography. They remind us not only of Germany's recent division, but also of the divisions informing the Jewish experience of modernization. In the film, the tension between the disparate figures condenses and articulates the East-West dichotomies and asymmetries from "German" and "Jewish" discourses, albeit with some unpredictable twists and incongruities.<sup>313</sup>

Realizing the comic potential in the play of mistaken identities, Levy orchestrates a scenario with paradoxical outcomes. Two Jewish families come together from different geographic directions at this charged location: one family from the former East Germany, from East Berlin; and the other family from the former West Germany's – and now the European Union's – financial capital of Frankfurt. Both places, steeped in distinctly different histories and ideologies, serve as "gateways to the past" (Glaeser 78). They suggest the common conceptual pairings of East/backwardness and West/progress lingering in German consciousness, and which the visual pairings of the Zuckermans/visible Orientalized Jewishness and their counterpart in the Zuckers/invisible Jewishness serve to underpin. However, in a sweeping gesture, Levy does away with predictable categorizations and scrambles our expectations. Schmuël Zuckerman and his family – Joshua as the epitome of the traditional

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<sup>313</sup> Glaeser argues that the East/West divide is actually one of the hierarchies expressed in a variety of social practices, rhetorical tropes, and spatial and temporal interpretations, where the West is assumed to be "the model, the reference point, the telos of adjustments, while the east [is identified] as deficient, as needing change and adjustment" (Glaser 140).

Eastern and pre-modern Jew – turn out to be products of the West, whereas Jaecki Zucker – the secular and fully assimilated Jew with the Americanized name – and his family come from Germany’s internal Orient, “the nearest East” in Berlin (Kontje). This ironical reversal of the pattern comes unexpectedly. It consists of a seeming misalliance of characters and place and is meant to challenge thinking in categories of reductive East-West hierarchies. By tapping into the tacit knowledge about the East and the West as disclosed in Berlin’s symbolic geography, Levy is able to formulate his challenge.

Some scholars have taken issue with Levy’s approach. Gary Nathenson, for example, describes the film “as a troubling allegory of German reunification that utilizes the ‘Jew’ . . . as its figurative conduit” (Nathenson quoted in Ginsberg 511). I, however, offer a different reading. In my understanding, the film’s German reunification rhetoric is an overlay on the Jewish discourse of modernization and an avenue to address questions about inner-Jewish difference long missing in Germany. Instead of attending to the German issue of reconciliation between the two Germanies, the geographic aesthetics concerns a very different kind of reunion. It exploits the unification discourse to discuss the concerns of Germany’s new Jewry. Here, East Berlin is the site of transference of century-old notions of Eastern backwardness, lack of civilizational progress, and otherness. It mirrors the “willed imaginative and geographic division made between East and West” that Said (201) believes to inform the “boundary notion of East and West, the varying degrees of projected inferiority and strength”<sup>314</sup> (201). Along

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<sup>314</sup> Similarly, Kontje (179) reads episodes from contemporary German literature in terms of markers of a “recent chapter of Germany’s engagement with what could be called its Nearest East . . . [where] the ‘Orient’ is not the Middle East or distant India, but, rather, eastern Europe, east Germany, or even East Berlin.”

these lines, the Berlin locale is not readily separable from the realm of the Orient and becomes part of the overall Eastern geography.

In *Alles auf Zucker*, references to the former GDR and her perceived underdevelopment mesh temporal and geographic markers to reproduce the cleavages. Temporal markers juxtapose the “damals” (then) with the “heute” (today), for example, when Jaecki and Samuel argue over their lives’ trajectories and choices in the postwar era. They suggest a variety of displacements, and are coupled with the geographic border markers “here” and “there.” Combined, they conjure up notions of different levels of economic and technological progress in the East versus the West, which favor the linear progression of development in the West over the East’s presumed stagnation. Thus, when discussing their lack of communication over the course of decades, Schmuël, the Oriental Jew, feels empowered to quip that East Germany was until recently at the same technological level as the “Mittelalter,” the Middle Ages, following up his claim with the question “sind Sie aus dem Osten?” (are you from the East?) to help explain the technological handicap of supposedly inadequate (or rather, non-existent) telephone service during all these years of their silence. The brothers’ temporal and geographic displacements are legitimized and formalized by such metonymic identifications that serve to lock the other in a different place without leaving open the option to transcend its confines.

In a similar context, Jaecki justifies his financial misfortune vis-a-vis Samuel’s enviable financial solvency by contrasting the two currencies and the uneven economic worth of the “Ostmark” and the “DM”. In a moment of self-pity, Jaecki contemplates his fate as the “typische Wende-verlierer.” The image of the unlucky and eternal loser in the aftermath of unification culminates in a neighbor’s comment: “Seit der Wende hat der Mann nur Pech



gehabt. Jetzt soll er auch noch Jude sein,”<sup>315</sup> linking Jaecki’s East Berlin origins, and his economic difficulties after unification, to his Jewishness. Jaecki’s questionable professional ventures and failure to advance his career on his own successfully – his nightclub is at risk of going into bankruptcy under his management – attest to the supposedly inferior business acumen of the Easterner with the “Schnorrer” mindset of the “Ossi,” neither of which rank highly on the Western scale of progress. In this point, Levy draws an intimate line between Jewishness and the overarching grand narrative of progress. This could be a troubling analogy, because the notion of progress as a yardstick of civilization and culture had been applied to judge the process of Jewish modern subject formation in the past. Yet Levy’s script empowers the Oriental Jew, Schmuël, to assume the privileged status of the Westerner, whereas the modern Jew, Jaecki, is relegated to an inferior station in the economy of progress. With this new constellation, I argue, the film undermines the coherence of the narrative of progress and provokes a reassessment of categorizations held valid and true. In pitching the East against the West and inverting the pattern, Levy puts into question the reliability of our knowledge about the East / West border symbolism.

Secondly, beyond the rather amusing aspect of the mismatch, then, the unexpected positioning of the two families in the spatial coordinates particular to Berlin scrambles role and identification patterns. It emphasizes Berlin as a contact zone where boundaries become blurred and porous. One place that stands out in this regard as a site of recalibration is Jaecki’s business. Jaecki, more unsuccessfully than not, owns and runs a Berlin bar and nightclub called “Club der Mitte.” The name may well refer to its actual location in the Berlin neighborhood of Mitte, yet it

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<sup>315</sup> “Since ‘the turn,’ the man has experienced only bad luck. Now and on top of it, he’s even supposed to be a Jew.”

most certainly refers to the social and cultural brokering taking place under its roof. The club – defined by its intimate size and openness – serves as a symbolic nexus located in some geographic middle ground between East and West where potentially meaningful interactions happen on a multiethnic basis. Neither “here” nor “there” and exempted from Berlin’s binary geography, the venue occupies a liminal space that facilitates transfers and entanglements of various sorts for its customers and staff. Yet, on the verge of bankruptcy, the bar is on shaky grounds. Its survival and that of its colorful mix of employees from different cultural backgrounds is in jeopardy when Jaecki is unable to borrow the money to pay wages and rent. As a result, the Club’s function as a common middle ground and meeting point is at risk, the outcome of its state of affairs as unclear as the negotiations and reconciliation process between the Zuckerman and Zucker families. In fact, its existence hinges on Jaecki’s success in raising the funds needed to keep the establishment afloat and thus is indirectly at the mercy of Joshua’s authority as judge in the family dispute – the paradox of the situation an apt reflection of the dependencies and complexities characterizing the discourse of Germany’s new Jewry.

Meanwhile, things take a turn in a different direction once Samuel mistakenly swallows an Ecstasy pill. He had developed a headache after learning about his niece Jana’s “unorthodox” lifestyle with her lesbian partner and begins to dance in the street, in trance-like fashion, the most Oriental of dances. Jaecki decides to save his brother from certain public and private embarrassment by taking him to his Club, a true safe haven from the scrutiny of Samuel’s wife and son. Here, Samuel can act out his hidden urges and sober up. Under the influence of the drug, the straight and always proper Samuel loses all inhibitions and begins to open up to his brother and to other influences outside of his orthodoxy. In the film, the vision of a familial rapprochement – and by extension of a united family of mankind – is produced through the

proverbial “an einem Tisch sitzen”<sup>316</sup> of all the players regardless of their ideological, cultural or ethnic location. For Samuel, this leads to a quite different kind of peacemaking: he flirts heavily with a Palestinian server costumed in Oriental Arabic dress, who seduces him to the sounds of Oriental and Klezmer music. Still enjoying the liberating effects of the drug, Samuel exchanges words and caresses with the server, apparently framing away any political or cultural incompatibilities. While the image draws on popular Oriental clichés – given the harem-like sensuousness of the club with its suggestive décor and music as well as the promise of “Oriental sex” (Said 190) with the dancer – Levy seems to accentuate the escapist potential Said reads into Western fantasies of the Orient. But in Levy’s scheme, this Orientalist escapism has real-life consequences. Once Samuel comes clean and returns to his family, his changed state of mind prevails and he continues on his conciliatory path, leading to the families’ amiable coming to terms with their differences over the mother’s will.

Although the impetus for the ground-braking entente is owed to the hallucinogenic drug that temporarily suspends Samuel’s Orthodox sensibilities and numbs any of the ideological baggage stored in his memory, the resulting moment of suspension and release is transformative, nevertheless. Levy evokes the idea that at times we need to let go of learned, uncompromising responses to the world, even if that may require sedating our thinking capacities. Suggesting that a less doctrinaire approach can be more productive than our over-reliance on principled reasoning, he peddles a humanistic perspective favoring an open mindset and attitude over the doggedness of ideology. By that margin, the “Club der Mitte” is the Berlin equivalent for the ideal of a rich contact zone, where just that kind of response to the world can be lived. It’s a space for social experiments outside of the norm. In a way then, it fits

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<sup>316</sup> “sitting together at the table”

Bodemann's (NGJ 2) description of the Jewish periphery in Europe's diaspora, which he credits for "reinventing 'positive' diasporic Jewish traditions in new religious and secular forms."<sup>317</sup>

Lastly, the cogency of Berlin's geographic symbolism also comes to bear in the active production of a distinctly Jewish space. Here, I rely on the definition offered by Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke (4) that "Jewish place is defined by location, Jewish space by performance" and on their emphasis on the interdependencies between the two concepts. They argue that "place and location . . . are always part of spatial dynamics," whereas "spatial performances are not devoid of real materiality and take place in specific local settings and geographical surroundings". They thus describe a dialectical process producing what they call "Jewish topographies."<sup>318</sup> As the premise of this analytical category suggests, the Berlin locale in the film should be understood as the framework within which Jewish space "is done." It means that interpretations of how that space is constructed should be mindful of the role of place as well. Looking at the construction of Jewish identity through the prism of space and place yields insights into the kind of cultural narrative encoding the entanglements with the environment. If we remember that during the Jewish modernization and emancipation process, the "deutsche Kulturraum" (German cultural space) and Berlin became an active zone of cultural transfers where Jews would engage with the dominant culture to negotiate the transformation of Jewish life, it appears that Berlin emerges again as an important reference point. Jeffrey Peck (154), for example, observes the development of a distinct "German-Jewish"

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<sup>317</sup> Bodemann, in his anthology *The New German Jewry and the European Context*, from 2008, speaks of the "polarization in the Jewish Diaspora" (2) and of a "daring new insistence on the centrality of Diaspora as the essence of Jewish cultural life" leading to the reinvention of Jewish traditions.

<sup>318</sup> Brauch, Lipphardt, and Nocke are the editors of the anthology *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place* (2008), which gives an excellent introduction to and overview of new and current spatial approaches in Jewish studies.

identity in contemporary Berlin. He even mentions the notion of a “new German Jew” – a category that also resonates in Diana Pinto’s thesis of the emergence of a uniquely European Jewish space. According to her research of a historian, this unique space is made possible both despite and because of the interplay between Jews and their gentile surroundings. Her argument suggests that the performance of Jewish space is always a movement within the respective cultural networks and results in a unique experience of Jewishness, rather than in a kind of transcendent or ahistorical Jewish identity free from the constraints of time and place.

While Peck and Pinto draw on political and historical discourse and various statistical data to make their claims, Levy’s film actually showcases some of the mechanisms of the process. In response to the particularities of the German environment, I contend, he makes a bid for Judaizing space with the goal to enable the reconfiguration of Jewish life in Germany. In this vein, the film advances an interesting alternative to previous models. Jaecki, the Eastern Jew missing any signs of Jewishness and withdrawn from his ethnic Jewish heritage, needs to reenact Jewish traditions to become eligible as the co-heir of his mother’s will. Thus, in order to comply and be able to accommodate Samuel and his family at their home, Marlene and Jaecki must equip their apartment to reflect a Jewish home. Since neither of them possesses the necessary knowledge – Jaecki due to willed forgetting and Marlene due to her gentile roots – they resort to the manual *Wie Juden leben* (How Jews live) to find definitions for all things Jewish. They learn step by step how to make a Jewish home or even how to observe the “shiva” mourning ritual. Energized by a frenetic run to the Judaica store around the corner, they follow the handbook’s instructions when decorating their house with various paraphernalia symbolizing Jewish traditions, such as a menorah and mezuzah. And, in accordance with strict

halakhic laws, they even stock their fridge with kosher food items after throwing out their non-kosher dietary supplies.

Importantly, Jaecki is not the only one or the leader in turning their home quickly into a model Judaic home. Marlene, his “schickse” wife and the mother of his bastard children, takes on a leading part in the performance. As she recognizes the requirement to make adjustments, she urges her “Jewish” husband to begin their acculturation into being Jewish and encourages their “re-ethnicization” training. It is through her voice and actions that the audience, alongside the Zuckers themselves, is initiated into Jewish cultural practices. Now, her willingness to embrace and implement the foreign customs infers an openness towards Jewishness that may easily read as philo-Semitic or phony, when in fact it may point to her facility to balance the pragmatic concerns of a family hostess and a sense of ease and flexibility in dealing with religion. Unencumbered by religious dogma, Marlene works together with Jaecki towards a common goal and adopts Jewish ceremonial laws, even if their external articulation of Jewishness is only meant to compensate for their wanting internalization of religious beliefs. Clearly, she’s not interested in any religious conversion, but rather in supporting the idea of the cultural or secular Jew. She seeks to establish a connection to Jewish heritage through an interest in and knowledge of all things Jewish. Her balancing act is a gesture to build the minority’s customs into their own lives and private sphere and is made meaningful through their integration into Jewish spaces in the public sphere. Two Berlin landmarks demonstrate the communal embeddedness of their efforts: one is the legendary “Neue Synagoge,” where the two families attend Shabbat service together; the other is the historical Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Weissensee – the burial ground for the mother. The “Neue Synagoge,” built in 1866, is known for having been the largest place of worship for Jews in Germany and the external manifestation

of a flourishing Jewish community. By contrast, the cemetery is a reminder of the legacy of that very community in Berlin.<sup>319</sup> Either place extends Jaecki and Marlene's personal home transformation toward an experience of how Jewish space is lived in Berlin today at the level of community. It is generated through the actors' complementary movement between private and public sites.

Then again, the flaws and ironies of the makeshift acculturation surface during their synagogue visit. Notwithstanding the fact that Marlene, with her head covering, looks the part, wedged amongst the other praying women, her lack of knowledge of Hebrew betrays her appearances when she holds the prayer book upside down and is unable to read along. Within a few days of trying to keep up appearances and being quite aware of their faulty masquerade both as a happy couple and as Jews, Marlene admits to the combined families "es ist alles Schwindel und Lüge" (it's all swindles and lies). Even if this admission of having put on a show undermines the effectiveness of the production of Jewish space, it should not, however, deflect from the film's investment in the dynamic nature of space-making practices. Without speculating too far, Marlene's involvement, I claim, addresses the positioning of non-Jewish spouses in the exercise of 'doing' Jewish space and proposes a new role for the gentile population altogether. Refuting the idea of a passive by-stander or outsider, her participation models an active engagement with and pragmatic approach to Judaism. After all, she resorts to a handbook to get a grip on it – a grip that definitely preempts any attempts at exoticizing or mysticizing Jewishness as is so often the case in public discourse. As Marlene exhibits an

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<sup>319</sup> Britta Wauer's award-winning documentary *Im Himmel, unter der Erde* from 2011, about the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Weissensee, "portrays an enchanted, yet lively landmark" (DVD cover) and a place of encounter with meaning for Jews in Germany and from around the world.

almost uncanny sense of ease among her Orthodox relatives, the rabbi or the congregation, her disposition works to strip Jewishness of its peculiarity. It opens up the door for contact with Judaism, even emboldening the audience to imagine themselves in Marlene's character. With her insertion into the space-making project, Levy pushes an agenda of demystifying Jewishness for the gentile viewing-public, while broadening its range of membership. In particular, this goal is achieved through linking Marlene and Jaecki's efforts at Judaizing<sup>320</sup> space at home and those public spaces of Jewish life generally represented by the official face of German Jewry. While the Frankfurt Zuckermans voice their doubts about the credibility of Jaecki and Marlene's Jewish home, the representation of the private, "unofficial" Jewish space alongside the public, endorsed Jewish space, and of the participating factions, the dynamics of the space-making project become exposed.

In this regard, the cemetery actually highlights another critical aspect of these dynamics. As the final resting site and permanent home for the dead, it is the ultimate and enduring testimony to the intertwined relationship between the Jewish public and private space. If we accept this premise, then the burial practice becomes a final place-making activity in a person's life and for her family. In *Alles auf Zucker*, Jaecki and Samuel's mother wishes to make Berlin her final resting place, which requires her "repatriation" to the city she considers home. Here, the Jewish cemetery as a designated Jewish space becomes a surrogate for the country of origin, the burial itself the performing spectacle that finalizes and commemorates the interrelation between the private and the public space and in which each family member plays his part.<sup>321</sup> By

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<sup>320</sup> Y. Michal Bodemann coined the term "Judaizing milieu" and I'm adapting it as a gerund to describe the activity of creating a Jewish space.

<sup>321</sup> Osman Balkan, a graduate student in Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania, examines the repatriation practices of Turks in Berlin under the aspect of "death in the



coupling Jaecki and Marlene's Judaizing efforts at home with the Berlin cemetery and synagogue, Levy further capitalizes on the city's geographic symbolism. With the production of a uniquely German Jewish space its goal, Levy's film enacts the mechanisms of German Jewish identity formation in the spatial configuration particular to Berlin and its history.

#### 4.2.3 Discursive Shifts and a Different Kind of "Normality"

*Ich denke, dass sich die Welt von Dogmatismen befreien müsste und wir zu Freidenkern werden sollten! . . . Alles auf Zucker! war ein Versuch, Kino zu machen, das intelligent unterhält, . . . den Zuschauer thematisch und politisch fordert, ihn aber durch Humor und durch die Möglichkeit des Lachens mehr in Ruhe lässt. Ich glaube, Lachen ist immer auch Empathie.*"<sup>322</sup>(Levy in Bleuler, 66-69)

If my discussion to this point chiefly addressed the film's concern with the "new German Jew" (Peck 161) and his strategies of mediation within the Jewish community – a kind of inward gaze – then I wish to turn now to a discussion of its dual structure by including the film's outward gaze. First, a reminder of Stuart Hall's understanding of cultural identities in terms of strategic positioning within the respective historical moment is in order. Levy's Jewish characters serve as examples of such positioning in contemporary Germany, the film itself creating a timely platform from which to analyze the intersection of discourses and the production of Jewish space. As these characters perform their place and space-making activities, they navigate a cultural terrain furrowed by political and public discourses still focused on the Holocaust victim

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diaspora." He conceived of the term "necro-patriotism" to describe the "politics of belonging of Turks in Berlin" that emerge through their preference to be buried in the village of their origins in Turkey.

<sup>322</sup> I think that the world should free itself from dogmatism and we should become liberal thinkers! . . . Go for Zucker was an attempt at making intelligent cinema that entertains, . . . challenges the viewer thematically and politically, but leaves rather him at peace through the use of humor and the chance to laugh. I think laughter is always empathy.

and questions of memory. The pursuit of the past surfaces in the controversies over sites of remembrance, such as museums and memorials organized around tropes of the void, loss, and rupture. In such debates, Berlin takes on a special status by virtue of being the capital and the primary locus of the “Jewish renaissance” in Germany. The conception and erection of Berlin’s Holocaust Memorial that opened in 2005 – the year of the film’s release – received broad public attention and exemplifies the intensity of the discussions. Without questioning the importance of those “lieux de memoire”<sup>323</sup> and their placeholder function for German collective memory, I wish to submit the following observation. In the struggle for an appropriate place for the Nazi legacy and the victims of their reign in German memory, the spatial practices and the experiences of a growing Jewish minority have been marginalized or folded into the victim narrative. The discussion about the Holocaust Memorial not only coincides with Levy’s project, but it proves my point. Challenging such oversight and the perhaps one-sided emphasis on brick-and-mortar representational sites, Levy appears to quite calculatingly redirect the public’s attention to the experience of living Jews instead and at the very moment in time when the eyes of the public are set on the past.

Thus, the focal point Levy establishes with his camera shows a picture radically different from what Germans commonly get to see and culminates in the hyperbolized Oriental genre tableau. Given the comedic structure of the film and the taboos it breaks along the way, Levy seems to signal with loud and bold gestures in the effort to capture Germans’ attention, espousing an “in-your-face” attitude. Rather than toeing the official line, he takes on a discourse consumed with the Holocaust victim by forcing the recognition that there are living Jews in

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<sup>323</sup> Pierre Nora, with his concept of “lieux de memoire,” emphasizes the need to reconcile the absence of collective memory and history and describes how such “lieux de memoire” have an important symbolic dimension for the national collective.

Germany and that these Jews come in a variety of shades representing a variety of perspectives. Not surprisingly, critics have taken Levy to task for the audaciousness of his proposal. Following Cary Nathenson's (2) argument, for example, it appears that for him the Holocaust marks a bottom line that must be respected in representations of Germans and Jews. He believes the film crosses that line when "convincing Germans that they have overcome their historical and cultural alienation from Jews by revealing that Jews are just Germans in costume." Similarly, Terri Ginsberg (513) faults the film's humor for "mystify[ing] the social coordinates and functioning of German racism" and suspects Levy's "self-positioning . . . in line with the philosemitic mold." Both Nathenson and Ginsberg offer a reading of the film in the tradition of Holocaust discourse and a critique of the discourse of "normalization" that emerged in the wake of the "Historikerstreit" (historians' debate) of 1986. Whereas the former builds on Holocaust etiquette as the guiding principle in the representation of Jews, the latter refers to Germany's national project of "normalization" – a conceptual vessel for articulating Germany's political efforts to be a 'normal' state absolved from its perpetrator status.<sup>324</sup> That said, these critics resist what I consider to be the film's invitation to a broader reading of Jewishness, where the contingencies of modern German-Jewish subjectivity are located in the play of difference.

By installing a striking, if not unique, Jewish physical presence in Berlin, Levy takes on arrested conceptions of Jews and Judaism and works against what Peck (125) calls "deep-seated prejudices and mindless stereotypes that persist about Jews." He takes pleasure in the invention of his overdrawn characters only to suggest that Jewish identities are produced "through transformation and difference" (Hall 402) within that field of competing forces on the German

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<sup>324</sup> Ruth A. Starkman, in the anthology *Transformations of the New Germany*, from 2006, gives a detailed summary of the notion of normalization, with a focus on German-Jewish relations.

cultural terrain. Consequently, these characters mandate a different attitude about Jewishness. As a younger generation of Jews comes into its own, we witness its search for alternative ways of being Jewish and the rise of a voice concerned with living Jewish culture.<sup>325</sup> Journalist and writer Rafael Seligmann captures this trend early on in the exclamatory title *Die Juden leben* in a 1992 Spiegel magazine article – a trend that is further making headlines today in Jewish-themed pop cultural events not only in Berlin, but also around the country. Mareike Albers (107), for example, discusses Berlin’s active and immensely popular Jewish-Israeli party scene among non-Jewish Germans and observes an increasing fascination with the performances of Jewish comedians, musicians and DJs. She makes the point that the “unkosher” play with Jewish identity on the dance floor or on stage is a strategic use of Jewish cultural identity, which by consequence “can remain undefined, open, and changeable.” Wladimir Kaminer, the Russian immigrant Jew to Germany, exemplifies this trend in its more extreme orientation. He draws on multiple and diverse venues to artistically engage with ethnic diversity and the multiculturalism in Germany – his own Jewishness representing just one aspect of his identity among many others.<sup>326</sup> Taken together, such articulations respond to Moishe Postone’s (279) challenge from 1996 that “Jews must now find a voice that is tied to a new form of life in Germany.” In a way, these Jews from real life meet their fictional, filmic counterpart in Levy’s *Alles auf Zucker*.

From the German-Jewish perspective then, the underlying issue resonating throughout these efforts concerns the question of a Jewish “normality” and its feasibility in Germany. In

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<sup>325</sup> Susan Stern’s 1995 anthology *Speaking Out: Jewish Voices from United Germany* makes the fact “that there really is Jewish life here” the theme of her collage of different voices.

<sup>326</sup> Similarly, journalist Richard Chaim Schneider’s book *Wir sind da!* from 2000 takes a look at Jewish life in Germany, but with a focus on the postwar years that Bodemann (JFG 7) reads as a “firm reassertion of Jewish life in Germany in full awareness of a terrible recent history.”

fact, the umbrella term of “normality” shelters different visions long harbored by Jews in Germany. The politician Daniel Cohn-Bendit (GIT 206), argues in 1996 that “when Germany is again accustomed to the fact that Jews in Germany can be employers and entrepreneurs, debtors and bankers, conservatives and Greens, ministers and independents, harlots and thieves – then being Jewish in Germany will have become normal,” whereas Micha Brumlik argues, in 1998, that “under ‘normal,’ I would understand everyday relationships in which all young people could treat each other impartially and without inhibitions, independent of whether they have Jewish or non-Jewish parents. This yearning for normalcy is completely justifiable and legitimate” (GIT 215); Ignatz Bubis conceives of “an attitude of critical normality” (Bodemann, JGM, 13). Adopting a more philosophical approach, Oliver Hirschbiegel’s character Emanuel Goldfarb, in the film *Ein ganz gewöhnlicher Jude* (2010), contemplates in monologue form how to be a “normal” German Jew two generations after the Holocaust. Far from representing a concerted effort, all of them, in one way or another, cope with the role of heir to the Holocaust victims and feel burdened by the task to uphold “the moral high ground among the Germans” (Starkman 246), or, in Susan Stern’s (20) words, they “feel they have to live up to the elevated image” of “morally superior human beings.”

In contrast to weighty political and philosophical discourse, Levy’s characters explore and perform practical answers to that same question. They contribute to the debate by making transparent what had been bypassed or left unattended. Being Jewish himself and thus an inside informant, Levy enjoys clout in the German public sphere, granting his project authenticity and validity. He seems to proceed from the assumption that Germany’s new Jewry needs to emancipate itself from the limitations of this discourse to advance their ontological status from “Museumsjude” (museum Jew) to “Alltagsjude” (everyday Jew), from outsider to insider, from

exception to norm. As Levy thus pursues his own “normalizing” scheme, he draws on the archetype of the Oriental Jew and the Orientalist aesthetics to rehabilitate traditional Jewish life forms that had either been wiped out in the acculturation process, during Nazi genocide, or even rendered invisible in the postwar era. In transposing those figures into the present, Levy makes them visible and accessible again as a resource in and for the present. This strategy is important in postcolonial writing, as Neill Lazarus (141) points out. He identifies and appreciates it for seeking to “recover and transmit or provide access to modes of life, forms of culture, and ways of thinking that have been obliterated, destabilized, or rendered invisible by the systematic operations of power (global, national, and local) over the course of the past several hundred years.”

In this vein, *Alles auf Zucker* invokes different moments of the Jewish experience and the discourses in which the Jewish subject was and is spoken and projects those on the German cultural screen of today. Samuel Zuckerman and his family serve as examples of the displaced Oriental Jew who finds himself a vested member in the German entrepreneurial community, with claims to the land as real estate owner and broker. Jaeki Zucker compares to the figure of the rogue Behn-Condit describes and as indicative of any kind of progress made in the “normalization” process. Rather than emphasizing rupture, this kind of projection becomes a means of creating continuity and is achieved through what Glaeser (172) calls the weaving together of “events/experiences removed from each other in space and time, encounters with different people, in different circumstances.” This kind of continuity thesis comes at the risk of ignoring “the elephant in the room,” the Holocaust. However, it allows for tying together otherwise disjointed elements of the German Jewish experience and for making a part of the Jewish past outside of the Holocaust meaningful today, even with the knowledge of its

rupturing effects. In the film, this rupture is briefly acknowledged when Jaecki makes an emotional plea to a friend for financial support, reminding him that “ich habe doch die Familie im Holocaust verloren.”<sup>327</sup> As such, *Alles auf Zucker* achieves greater depth despite its lighthearted and seemingly uncritical cadence. It participates in a discursive shift that empowers a new generation of Jews in Germany to speak in their own voice.

Importantly, the “normalization” Levy proposes thrives on accentuating the cultural fragmentation of the Jewish collective, which he peddles as an enriching and inspiring aspect of modern Jewishness. Per Levy, Germany’s new Jewry is unified by its fragmentation and diversification – a unity enacted in a scene towards the end of the film where Jaecki makes the plea to “die Mauer abreißen, die durch die Familie läuft.”<sup>328</sup> While the metaphor references Germany’s divided national history, it also speaks to a divided Jewish national history and the bifurcation of views along the same East/West axis. It brings to mind Bhabha’s notion of the “postcolonial perspective,” which relies on “the discourses of ‘minorities’ within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South” (LC 171). In fact, the imaginary wall separating the Jewish collectivity also separates Jews from the German collective at large. Levy calls for its removal while respecting difference. The ending of the film is instructive, when the two families part on good terms: Jaecki jovially makes the comment to his brother that he’ll be picking up the torah here and there and Samuel is seen flying home with the (almost gentile) granddaughter they have in common. These scenes hint at their mutual acceptance of their otherness. Thus, in appropriating the Orientalist archive, Levy begins to “unwrite” the Orientalist record inscribed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Jewish modernization era. But, he also

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<sup>327</sup> “but I lost my family in the Holocaust”

<sup>328</sup> “to break down the wall that divides the family”

tackles the issue of Jewish “normality” in the duality of his gaze directed at being Jewish within the Jewish community and at being Jewish in Germany.

#### **4.3 SO EIN SCHLAMASSEL: SCENES FROM “AUS DEM GHETTO” IN THE GERMANY OF 2009**

Among the discourses in which *Alles auf Zucker* intervenes, the notion of Jewish “normality” in Germany presents itself as a fundamental category. My reading of the film suggests that this normality is predicated upon the expansion of the canon of German Jewish identity and draws on two distinct traditions. Both relate to the Jewish experience of modernization known in the past and now resurfacing in the contemporary context: the disengagement from religious origins on one hand, and the tenacious holding on to those origins on the other hand. As the film shows, each tradition pulls the Jewish collective in opposite directions and must be reconciled with the unfolding Jewish narrative of the present.<sup>329</sup> For Levy, the Orientalist archive offers the opportunity to explore and shape the narrative in new ways and add to the notion of “normality.” The dual gaze he develops addresses the question of normality between Jews and non-Jews, but it is primarily focused on the question of what it means to be Jewish within the Jewish collective. Therefore, the film falls short in generating a vision for normalizing relations with the dominant culture. Yet other texts have taken up Levy’s project since, and continue the inward and outward discussion. One recent German TV production, *So ein Schlamassel*, stands

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<sup>329</sup> The two traditions mentioned are the two extreme positions on a broad spectrum that ranges from Orthodox Judaism to Conservative Judaism, from Neo-Orthodoxy to Reform Judaism and estrangement. Paul Mendes-Flohr, in *The Jew in the Modern World*, gives an overview of these movements.



out for creating structural ties with *Alles auf Zucker* through its invocation of the Orientalist archive and use of humor. It provides an extension to Levy's canvas and fills in areas left blank. In particular, this discussion focuses on the film's instrumentalization of the notion of the "Oriental cult" – cult being a loaded concept that comes with mostly negative connotations and which historically has been employed to defame the religious practices of minorities, including those of the Jewish minority. The Oxford English Dictionary, for example, defines "cult" as a "system of religious veneration" and a "group of people having religious beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or sinister." The combination "Oriental" with "cult" is a doubly negative designation and historically refers to Jewish rituals and traditions. In *So ein Schlamassel*, I argue, the "Oriental cult" serves as the film's organizing principle to advance its agenda of inspecting the Community's rules of membership and of demystifying Jewishness. Beyond this immediate goal, the film seeks to provide an identificatory framework that can accommodate the needs of a changing Jewish minority and the presence of the non-Jewish majority.

Written and produced by the German-Jewish Alice Brauner in 2009 for the German ARD's<sup>330</sup> prime time programming, the comedic feature film *So ein Schlamassel* projects a humorous and light-hearted portrayal of Jewish family life in the German capital of today. Unlike Levy's taboo-breaking slapstick comedy with its carnivalesque features, Brauner's film takes on a softened tone and somewhat pragmatic approach when probing into the issue of normality. The novelty of this approach may be explained with Brauner's relationship with her legendary film director father, Arthur Brauner, and her own attitude about Jewishness 50 years

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<sup>330</sup> The ARD belongs to Germany's network of public television stations and fulfills a complementary function in television programming to that of the private networks.

after the Holocaust. In his review of the film, Thomas Einkauf (Berliner Zeitung) summarizes that “als Kind eines legendären Filmmannes hat man es nicht leicht, seinen eigenen Weg zu gehen. Alice Brauner ist wie ihr Vater dem Jüdischen verbunden. Aber sie hat ihre eigene Sicht darauf, wie man etwas heute auf die Leinwand bringt,”<sup>331</sup> further paraphrasing her that “was für ihren Vater der Holocaust war, sei für ihre Generation der jüdische Alltag von heute, jüdische Kultur und Lebensweise”<sup>332</sup> to conclude that *So ein Schlamassel* “ist so ein Alltagsfilm.”<sup>333</sup> The predominantly positive reception in Germany of Alice Brauner’s first film production— even her father deemed the film a success despite his own Holocaust-centered perspective of Jewish life – can neither be divorced from the subject matter, nor from her unique take on negotiating a Jewish lived reality. Characterizing Brauner’s approach is the centrality of Jewish traditions in the life of the protagonists. Indeed, at first glance, the film reads like an ethnographic expedition into the mysterious and unknown world of German Jewry. It introduces the audience to the entire gamut of unfamiliar key rituals and holidays in the Jewish calendar in the course of the events: Hannukah, Shabbat, Bar Mitzvah, synagogue visits, prayers and blessings – all of which require explaining and commentary to be legible and allude to the separation between the Jewish from the gentile world. Jewish rituals and traditions, long deemed part and parcel of an “Oriental cult”<sup>334</sup> constitute the very “Komplex aus Brauchtum, klerikaler Hierarchie und spitzfindiger Scholastik”<sup>335</sup> that Franzos, according to Schwarz and Berman (386), held

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<sup>331</sup> “As the child of a legendary film personality, it is not easy to find one’s way. Alice Brauner shares her father’s attachment to Judaism. But, she has her own perspective of how to project this onto the screen.”

<sup>332</sup> “what the Holocaust was to her father, are Jewish everyday life, Jewish culture and lifestyle to her generation”

<sup>333</sup> “is such a movie about everyday life”

<sup>334</sup> Mendes-Flohr uses the term “Oriental cult” to discuss Jewish traditions.

<sup>335</sup> “the complex of tradition, clerical hierarchies and clever scholasticism”

responsible for the “jüdische Sonderdasein”<sup>336</sup> in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Historically considered the biggest obstacle on the path to modernization and emancipation, this “complex” is shown to again define and structure the lives of Jews in Germany today. Given that German Jewry had fought a hard battle in the past to overhaul a system of rules and allegedly “vacuous ritual obligations” (Mendes-Flohr) dictating a whole way of life and perpetuating the image of the Oriental Jew, Brauner’s strategy of attributing rituals a mediating function between the Jewish and non-Jewish culture is an interesting choice.

Meanwhile, scholars question the function and representation of Jewish religious rituals in current German literature and film. Critic Matthias Uecker (43-4), for example, is troubled by the representational challenges of “Jewishness – in the shape of specific religious rituals – [that] continue[s] to be performed as ‘other’ and exotic compared to an implicit standard of familiar and unmarked practices . . . [which] has the effect of pathologising them once more while reaffirming the unmarked, non-Jewish space as the yardstick of normality.” Similarly, Mona Koerte<sup>337</sup> (19) observes a trend in literary and filmic productions that she terms the “Musealisierung” of Jewish rites and customs to suggest that they exist “in einem kontextlosen Raum, deren religiöse Gegenstände folkloristisch und überkommen anmuten. Religion und Ritus sind pompöses Beiwerk einer überholten und abgelegten Zeit.”<sup>338</sup> Either evaluation reflects concerns over sealing off boundaries and returning Jews in Germany to their previous ghetto existence through representations of distinctive and distinguishing religious practices.

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<sup>336</sup> “Jewish separate existence”

<sup>337</sup> Uecker and Koerte’s articles appeared in the anthology *Religion and Identity in Germany Today*, from 2010, which features a collection of essays exploring questions of faith in German filmic and literary texts.

<sup>338</sup> “they exist in a space bare of context and in which religious artifacts seem folkloristic and outdated. Religion and ties are the pretentious accessories of a bygone time.”

Against such negative assessments, I assert, there is also an undercurrent at work in the representation of such rituals that runs counter to this surface current. Rather than being devoid of context and meaning, rituals are employed to contest society's yardstick of "normal" and sensitize the audience towards Jewish otherness in Germany. In this sense, *So ein Schlamassel* promises to destabilize the dichotomizing model of "normal" versus "other" by realigning the focal point from the dominant to the minority position. The film empowers the spectator to experience the events from the subjective point of view of the Jewish protagonists. As she witnesses the story through the eyes of those characters, she's invited to enter into an experience of self as foreign and "other" while responding to the emotional dilemma of the main figures. Moreover, this undercurrent also erodes the very foundation and legitimation of Jewishness. The rituals bring up difficult questions about rigid and codified terms of membership in the community. Thus, in my discussion, I will first trace how the figure of the Oriental cult turns from method of estrangement to method of identification, and, secondly, how this figure becomes the site of enactment of Germany's new Jewry's struggle to question the principles of belonging and suggest alternative ones.

The story of *So ein Schlamassel* centers around a single, young and seductive Jewess named Jill. Her close-knit and ever-present Jewish family wants nothing more for her than to find a husband – i.e., a Jewish one – and certainly not a "goy" or gentile. Discussions regarding their hopes and wishes for Jill frame the opening scene, when the extended family sits around the festively set holiday dinner table. This is not a holiday celebration viewers would understand without the commentary provided by Jill's matronly aunt and female head of the family. After all, the viewer is on unfamiliar terrain and needs the verbal legend to make sense of the images of strange foods, table settings and blessings in front of her. As we learn from the

aunt, the family, in its four-generation constellation that includes the soon-to-be 13-year-old Ruven as the youngest member, has gathered to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. The sequence begins with the Hebrew toast “L’Chaim” and a camera shot of the generous spread of traditional Jewish delectables at the dinner table, followed by a series of close-ups of the individual family members. While all the men of the family wear their head covering, the kippot, the grandfather Moische presiding over the table gives the appearance of the archetypical Jewish patriarch with his rough grey beard and Yiddish accent in German. His character unquestionably makes reference to the Eastern Jew, especially as we find out in a later scene that his age – presumably a “biblisches Alter” (biblical age) – is not quite certain, for he comes from some remote and backward place lacking detailed record-keeping.

The celebration early on in the film of the religious ceremony shared by the entire “mischpoche” serves as an important identification mechanism that fuses the family unit in a closed community and solidifies the notion of the family’s apparent otherness. Their repeated resolve that only a Jewish husband is acceptable to be included in this multi-generational bond of kinship verbally complements the exclusionary tale the visual image tells. Keeping in mind the significance of traditions and rituals for ethnic collectivities and the social cohesion and sense of community they foster in setting boundaries, these practices impose order and meaning considered essential to the group. Importantly, they rely on cultural transmission to fulfill their purpose, as their meaning only comes to bear when performed as a community. This meaning is voided with the lack of community. While this function of the ritual holds true for all social groups, it’s a particularly sensitive issue for Jews in Germany. Traditionally, the community of the family unit guarantees the transmission of cultural rites through generational continuity. Franzos had denied his Jews this viability when his protagonist, the young Sender, the link with

the future, dies prematurely; likewise, the earlier Kompert had consigned Jewish traditions and rituals to the past and thus to memory in the hopes of advancing Jewish integration. In *Der Dorfgeher*, the aging daughter's failure to find a husband, on the one hand, and the son's willingness to give up his Jewishness on the other, heralded the end of the line and hence the end of a Jewish way of life. In suspending the family function, both authors had ruptured the transmission chain and denied religious rituals and traditions their purpose. Conceptually speaking, these cultural practices became "ghettoized" in the modernization process – an isolation that underwent different phases at different historical moments and eventually resulted in the often quoted "Nullpunkt der Familie"<sup>339</sup> (Koerte 23) or the "Phase musealer Stillstellung"<sup>340</sup> (Koerte 19) in the postwar years, when the break-up of the Jewish community and absence of multi-generational family structures prevented or impeded the recognized transmission process.

Thus, in the film, the picture of the family celebrating the holiday ritual together to pass on Jewish traditions across the generational spectrum signals an important moment, especially in Germany. It raises the question of how *So ein Schlamassel* negotiates the obvious challenge to envision a viable future for Jews as Jews in Germany – a challenge Y. Michal Bodeman<sup>341</sup> (51), in 1996, translated into the impossibility of "a renaissance of Jewish life in Germany." Considering the uniqueness of the experience in this scene and its significance, it is not

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<sup>339</sup> "point zero of the family"

<sup>340</sup> "phase of immobilization like in a museum"

<sup>341</sup> Sociologist Michal Bodemann analyzes the "paradoxes of Jewish existence in Germany" in his 1996 publication *Jews, Germans, Memory*. Taking on a defeatist tone, he predicts that "in all likelihood, Jewish existence in Germany will be more muted," (45) and answers his question of whether the "Jews today, after the waning of their martyr-founders, still have something valuable to offer to Germany" with a "qualified negative" (45). In his 2008 publication *The New German Jewry and the European Context*, Bodemann's verdict, while still skeptical, offers a more hopeful vision of the "revival of Jewish culture and of the Jewish Diaspora in Germany."

surprising that potential disruptions of the order are felt with particular sensitivity and readily considered a threat to the community. Mary Douglas, in her scholarly work on ritual and taboo, *Purity and Danger* (1966), examines rituals in terms of boundary-setting practices that are, despite the myth of their enduring timelessness and immutability, always prone to change. She posits the tension between the community's internal efforts to preserve its inviolability through rituals and those external forces threatening to undermine the communal cohesiveness. This particular tension is operative in *So ein Schlamassel*: the film stages and reproduces Jewish rituals as a cohesive social force that is called into question when a series of events outside of the family's control provides the impetus to reconsider foundational assumptions about kinship and cultural belonging.

In the film, the external threat comes in the shape of a young gentile German man. When Jill pulls up late for the holiday dinner in front of her relatives' Berlin apartment, she crashes with a bicycle rider upon opening the door of her car. The young man is unhurt and the two move on after a brief exchange of words. Coincidentally, the scene repeats itself at the end of the night. This time, Marc Norderstedt's bicycle is trashed and Jill offers him a ride home in her car. As they part, they exchange addresses, and their seemingly impossible romance begins. An obstacle between them turns out to be their different religious backgrounds, immediately noticeable in the "Star of David" dangling from the rearview mirror and framed by their side-by-side profiles, separating them into two distinct categories of people. When, a few days after their first date, the family finds out about their budding relationship, their concern that "kann es sein, dass er ein goy ist?" (is it possible that he's a goy?) puts Jill under pressure to lie. In an attempt to avoid conflict, Jill asks Marc to pretend to be Jewish, and assigns him a Jewish name. Marc becomes "Jonathan Rosenzweig" upon acceptance of an invitation to yet another family

ritual, the weekly “Schabbes” dinner. However, before Jonathan is ready to meet the scrutiny of the relatives, he needs to undergo a Judaizing process and learn the rudiments of Hebrew prayers over bread and wine and the meaning of associated symbols. This is an intense process, as we remember from *Alles auf Zucker* and Jaecki and Marlene’s Judaizing efforts, and is particularly brutalizing for Marc. He is subjected to the uncompromising teaching methods of Jill’s Orthodox and lesbian friend Zippi, who, despite her objections to the makeshift conversion and the relationship – “ich bin gegen gemischte Beziehungen” (I’m against mixed relationships) – agrees to participate in Jill’s scheme.

Along with Marc, aka Jonathan, who is completely ignorant of the most basic Jewish cultural practices – “was ist Schabbes?” (what is shabbes?) – the viewer is inducted into Jewish customs and traditions. This initiation is obviously made necessary “since most Germans never meet Jews” in their own lives, according to Peck (65), and have only “little contact with Jews in their daily life” (Peck 64). Inevitably and for lack of other options, the non-Jewish viewer and Marc are aligned in the position of “goy” and outsider, both experiencing a sense of estrangement in their lonely roles outside of the presumed Jewish norm and quite evidently excluded from the Jewish family metaphor. This experience of alienation climaxes at the Schabbes dinner table, where Jonathan performs his newly adopted Jewish façade for all to judge. Kippa-clad and wineglass in hand, he fits the costume, yet almost betrays his performance when Jill’s father summons him to say “kiddusch” and he blurts out “habe ich geübt; kann ich” (I practiced that; I can do that). Once he recites the blessings in flawless Hebrew, the family acknowledges his performance with approving nods and engages Jonathan in a conversation intended to shed light on his Jewish lineage and family background.



Without a doubt, Jill's family is looking for authenticity. Jonathan's presumed family heredity and his performance of the ritual are apt tests of his legitimacy and ability to ensure cultural closure. After all, this is a fragile family unit – of which Ruven is so far the sole grandchild – whose survival and genealogical branching hinges on its offspring. Their multi-generational family structure symbolizes the hope of overcoming the generational vacuum and said "Nullpunkt" (ground zero), which has been found to be the biggest handicap of a Jewish renaissance in Germany and one that is compounded by a set of halakhic standards the Jewish Community enforces that only few of the Russian-Jewish immigrants even manage to meet. Peck (54), for example, points out that these Russian Jews often can neither join the Community, nor can they "participate in services nor send their children to religious school" for their failure to credibly document their Jewish origins and their lack of "Jewish education or knowledge of tradition and rituals" (Peck 49). Ironically, these characteristics pair up the Russian Jews with the non-Jewish Jonathan and place both on the outside, along with any other gentile. Rather than fostering continuity between generations, religious rituals as defined by halakhic laws thus turn out to be an idiom of estrangement, if not rupture, not only for the gentile collective, but also for Germany's Russian Jews. The seemingly casual inspection of Jonathan's biological record over conversation at the dinner table epitomizes the estranging effect, as it creates a self-essentializing narrative meant to patrol the boundaries of the family community and bar outsiders from its reproductive cycle.

While for some time Jonathan can fool Jill's family into believing that he's a Jew, the charade is finally exposed during the celebration of the most important ritual on the path to becoming a fully endorsed and recognized member of the Jewish community: Ruven's bar mitzvah. As Jill explains to Jonathan, "es ist so etwas wie eine Konfirmation" (it's something

like a confirmation), symbolizing a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, and is enacted in the handing down of the torah scroll through the parental line. As the story goes, Jonathan's parents are invited to the festivities and accept with some reluctance, only to get actively immersed in the "Oriental"-style Jewish dancing, expressing their sense of distanced involvement in the comment "diese Leute verstehen zu feiern" (these people know how to celebrate). Unbeknownst to them, they have become pawns in Jill's and Jonathan's charade, and pass as Jewish until the end of the evening. When Jonathan's father makes a bathroom visit and Ruven happens to observe that he's not circumcised, the child determines that neither this man, nor his son, "Jonathan," can credibly be Jewish. He immediately reports back to the rest of the family, who are shocked to learn Jonathan's true identity as a German "goy" after all. They reproach Jill for having betrayed them, and when the grandfather collapses over the news, the impossibility of the relationship seems to be sealed.

Even though Marc had successfully performed the role of Jill's Jewish boyfriend and passed several tests, as a goy, he ultimately can not be trusted, nor can he fulfill the expectations that come with being an "authentic" Jew. In a reverse model of stigmatization, Marc is scarred by his lack of the paradigmatic "sign of the covenant in Genesis" (Gilman 9). He's bereft of "the inscription of the body that sets the Jews apart in the Diaspora," as Sander Gilman describes male circumcision.<sup>342</sup> Comparable to an act of penetration by a stranger, Jonathan's presence is understood to introduce an entropic element into the family, much like the arrival of Russian Jews in Germany is seen as a disruptive force that is feared will change the configuration of the community. The parallels between the two outsider positions lie at hand: for the Jewish Community, the claims of the immigrant Jews present a sobering disappointment

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<sup>342</sup> Sander Gilman has written extensively on the male Jewish body and male circumcision.

and hazard, for they violate the rules of membership, just as for Jill's family the discovery of Jonathan's fake identity infringes upon their presumed immutability.

Whereas these events stress the rituals' function in delimiting membership in the community and therefore fostering a sense of estrangement, several anecdotal incidents embedded in the story, however, allow for identifications with Jill and her family. A turning point is observable when Jill and Marc become a real couple. They both have to face bias and prejudice from Marc's own family and colleagues. The film speaks to German insensitivities and lingering anti-Semitism when, for example, Marc's aunt and uncle tell offensive Jewish jokes at their first dinner meeting at the house of his parents, or when Marc's mother presumes that Jill on account of her Jewishness follows a kosher diet. Their attitudes capture, in a nutshell, the incapacity of Germans to engage with Jews in "normal" encounters. The inappropriate humor and other clumsy comments speak to the persistence of prejudice among Germans and the survival of inherited thought patterns from racial discourse – as innocent as they may seem at times – that result in tensions and conflict. Marc himself experiences such tension when his architect boss and partner insults him with racist remarks about Jill and her presumed Jewish shrewdness with money. In adopting Jill and Marc's perspective as targets, the film unmask the hurt and discrimination such thoughtless remarks and attitudes cause, and challenges the audience to reflect on its own position. And, in a parodic inversion, Jill counters the uncle's joke with one of her own to prove that there are two sides to this kind of humor, whereas Marc responds with his fists to silence his boss – and loses his job following the brawl. The act of leaving the boss and relatives speechless has a redemptive quality to it, with consequences for anyone rooting for the couple: if the gentile audience had aligned with Marc and felt his otherness – and by inference its own – in the presence of Jill's family, then the

tactless remarks by Marc's family and boss produce a profound sense of embarrassment and alienation from the non-Jewish collectivity. The language of postcolonial criticism can explain this play of role reversal as it describes the postcolonial literary project of providing "a gateway to *feeling* otherness, experiencing how it might be to be *beside oneself* " (Boehmer 258).<sup>343</sup> Admittedly, *So ein Schlamassel* puts only a small dent into the bigger problem of anti-Semitism, but in integrating the issue in the story, the film holds up a mirror to the non-Jewish viewer and grants her a moment of precious self-reflection without moralizing or lecturing.

Finally, behind the story of Jonathan's performance, there is another, secondary performance in play that relativizes the meaning of Jewish kinship and ritual. Ruven's father Mickey, the husband of Jill's cousin Netty, undergoes some sensitive health screenings for his prostate problems only to receive the bad news, on the day of his son's bar mitzvah, that he's infertile: his sperm will not allow him to father any children. Confronted with the uncanny realization that Ruven cannot be his biological son, he retreats in hurt and fails to show up at synagogue for the ceremony of handing down the torah from generation to generation and to perform his fatherly duties. Upon mediation from Jill the very same evening, Mickey comes to understand that his role as father is not determined by his biological link with Ruven alone. Rather, it is a cultivated relationship that develops through nurture and can produce a strong and legitimate bond endowed with the privileges equal to those between a father and his biological son. In this case, the paternal role symbolic of safeguarding the integrity of the community turns out to be performance-based and independent from the bloodline. As Ruven's lineage and that

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<sup>343</sup> Elleke Boehmer (258), in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, discusses "the political and ethical contests which postcolonial texts have been waging" to argue that cultural texts "have provided space . . . to produce declarations of restorative, not vengeful, perhaps even transcendent or humanist overcoming."

of Germany's Russian Jews proves uncertain – Netty believes that the life guard at the hotel pool in Israel is the biological father – the film refutes the usefulness of halakhic laws to judge membership. It proposes that Jewish identity can indeed be cultivated rather than claimed through the biological record alone. If Ruven's example is any indication, then Jewish life cycle events and traditions can provide the vehicle for experiencing and feeling Jewishness under the guidance and leadership of other vested senior members. Under such conditions, a new Jewish space, capable of accommodating Jews with questionable lineage, or self-identifying Jews from various backgrounds, can be created. For Ruven, this means that much to his relief, Mickey returns to the festivities by the evening to initiate his son into full membership in the community of Jews.

The solution the film provides for Ruven and his parents anticipates the answer it gives to Jill and Marc's dilemma. Weeks after the bar mitzvah and Jill and Mark's break-up, the family comes to realize that Jill's future is with the "goy." The most unlikely mediator of all, the Orthodox Zippi, in an effort to make amends and recognizing the need to redefine what counts as Jewish, rallies the family together to visit Marc and his parents and invite him back into their ranks. In a very ambitious and perhaps overly optimistic final sequence, the entire *mischpoche* knocks at the door of Marc's parents to plead their case in favor of the couple. Without much hesitation, Marc and Jill seal the proposal with a kiss accompanied by the blessings from both families. The picture of the blended families standing together at the end of the film hints at the emergence of a different kind of family structure with new possibilities for the future of Jewish life, making it possible to imagine what this new family might look like. The happy ending has implications of an even wider range as it extends the family metaphor to accept other outlying positions into the canon of modern German Jewish identity. The cast of

diverse characters introduced in *Alles auf Zucker* is back on stage for an encore in *So ein Schlamassel* in a line-up that adds the gentile family and Zippi's immigrant Israeli partner from a Hassidic background. For Zippi and her partner, Berlin turns out to be the only place where they can live their alternative life style and ignore the fact that it contradicts the traditionally defined role of the Jewish female – Israel is not an option, as the couple must discover.<sup>344</sup>

With these perhaps most extreme outsider positions nominated for acceptance in the community, this film, too, raises the question about a new Jewish “normality” and addresses the urgency of the appeals to align Jewishness with a changing lived reality. It suggests that neither biological ties, nor the intensity of ethnic-religious ties, are suitable criteria by which to delimit Jewishness, for rigid categories need to be replaced by a more dynamic model. As a result, *So ein Schlamassel* envisions a place for the gentile population in this new family model. Productive encounters make accessible a culture and way of life previously held strange and beyond reach, the “Oriental cult” playing a vital role in creating attachments.

#### 4.4 CONCLUSION

*Alles auf Zucker* and *So ein Schlamassel* are above all about “being Jewish in the new Germany” – the title and topic of Jeffrey M. Peck's 2006 ethnographic exploration into contemporary Jewish life in Germany – and contribute to broadening the range of

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<sup>344</sup> Y. Michal Bodemann (2-3), in *The New German Jewry and the European Context*, observes a “growing gap between Diaspora Jews and Israel” leading to “a daring new insistence on the centrality of Diaspora,” but also to a growing interest among the “Israeli elites . . . turning away from an almost exclusive orientation towards the US. They have rediscovered and found European interlocutors.”

identifications available to Germany's new Jewry. United by Orientalist tropes, the films recycle and adapt Orientalist discourse elements to draw attention to the needs of a growing and younger generation of Jews in Germany for whom the framework of identifications is quite different from those of earlier postwar generations. Repeated references to such tropes in both films introduce a new representational vocabulary and thus inform a discursive shift observable in a variety of cultural texts that, combined, strive to reach some Jewish "normality" and move beyond reductive inscriptions of Jewishness. In this sense, the two filmic texts are characterized by their palimpsestic quality, with the contemporary narrative of "modernization" written on the faded Orientalist record. As a result of this fusion of discourses, Levy and Brauner break out of existing discourse patterns and inject vitality into a stale and often gridlocked political debate.

While *Alles auf Zucker* puts the figure of the Oriental Jew squarely at the center of its modernization project and posits Berlin as the geographic idiom of a new Jewish space, *So ein Schlamassel* invokes Jewish traditions and rituals, long discredited for the "Oriental ways" they prescribe for Jews, to propose amending the canon of German Jewish identity. Levy and Brauner promote a dynamic notion of Jewishness premised on a more open cultural identity as Jews rather than a religiously defined, narrow Jewishness. They demonstrate that Jewish identity, too, is a "strategic fiction" in response to outside circumstances and is indeed what Stuart Hall (CI 394) calls a "matter of becoming as well as of being [and] belongs to the future as much as to the past." Incorporating the Orientalist discourse in which the Jewish self was spoken in the past means reappropriating it to formulate a new Jewish self in the present – a strategy emphasizing Jewish identity formation as a dynamic process that draws on various registers and refuses to be locked in, neither by ghetto walls nor by discursive structures.

One way to read this effort is with the concept of the postcolonial gaze defined in Jochen Dubiel (67) as the opportunity “die im kolonialen Blick verankerten Stereotype und autoreferenziellen Funktionalisierungen des Fremden durch die Umstellung von Perspektiven, durch die Überführung linearer Dichotomie von Eigenem und Fremdem in binäre Zirkularität, durch die Enthüllung des Unheimlichen im heimlich Vertrauten . . . in textimmanenter Reflexion zu überwinden.”<sup>345</sup> This gaze translates into a voice that documents the presence of the Jewish Other rather than its absence, and works through the Jewish experience of otherness. Even though Herbert Uerlings<sup>346</sup> (22) laments, in his discussion of postcolonialism and German literature, that the Holocaust almost wiped out “die wichtigste ‘andere Kultur’ im deutschsprachigen Bereich” and the “Abwesenheit der Stimmen der sogenannten ‘Anderen,’”<sup>347</sup> the films seem to prove otherwise. However, rather than aiming to restore an “authentic” voice or way of life of the Jewish subaltern, the films suggest the emergence of a new German Jew who does not seem to fit easily into existing categories and whose difference may best be explained in Russell Berman’s (Bodemann 181) words from 2008, that “Jewish populations in Europe need to be seen in their national contexts . . . . In short, Jewish populations need to be differentiated by national and political affiliations as well as religious identifications.”

From this perspective it is possible to locate in the films a matrix structure of identifications (as opposed to a hierarchical structure) on which Germany’s new Jewry can draw

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<sup>345</sup> “to overcome the stereotypes and self-referential functionalization of the Other inherent in the colonial gaze through the realignment of perspectives, through the change from linear dichotomies to binary circularity of the familiar and the unfamiliar, through the unmasking of the uncanny in the canny by way of text-based reflections.”

<sup>346</sup> Herbert Uerlings considers Jewish culture to be the most important “other culture” in the German-speaking cultural sphere, yet argues it to be absent since the Holocaust almost wiped it out.

<sup>347</sup> “the most important ‘other culture’ in the German-speaking sphere” and the “absence of the voice of the Other”



and which includes the gamut of Jewish identities imaginable today – a register that had been depleted, reduced and closeted in the course of history. Both films subscribe to humor and irony to expand the repertoire and thus facilitate identifications with Jewish culture also for those for whom received forms of representations preclude such possibility. Making Jewish culture accessible for gentiles and Jews outside of the community through the Orientalist aesthetic lifts the veil of Jewish invisibility for a mass audience and unlocks the postwar ghetto gates. It is also part of a “normalization” process that tackles the conflict within the Jewish Community about its growing diversity, rather than the conflict with the dominant, gentile population and points to the ruptures dividing Jews in German. As the aestheticized equivalent of political discourse, *Alles auf Zucker* and *So ein Schlamassel* shoulder together the effort to renegotiate the terms for “being Jewish in Germany” today and write an important part of the contemporary German Jewish narrative.

## 5.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

When reunification in 1989/90 ended the divided postwar histories of the two Germanies, the struggle for the political and cultural integration of East and West left its scars on the German national psyche. While the structural fusion of the separate parts under the aegis of the Berlin Republic appeared to have worked in economic and political terms, the merger at the same time exposed the old East / West fault line and even produced new fissures. Perhaps one of the more unexpected consequences was that, with the breakdown of the Iron Curtain and the capitalist / communist antagonism, the premise of both German and European identity had evaporated overnight. No longer could Germans think of themselves as in binary opposition to Europe's East, but rather as at the geographic center of Europe's political, economic, and social reorganization.<sup>348</sup> This loss of a critical pillar of the identificatory scaffolding was aggravated by the discovery of the German "Other" in their Eastern counterparts – an experience that would lead to some serious soul-searching of what it means to be German, as well as how to tackle the difficult task of reconciling disparate histories and mentalities.

Although often viewed through the lens of the dominant population, minorities in Germany were equally drawn into the shuffle. In a parallel to the confrontation between Germans from the East and the West, Germany's Jews came face to face with their own Eastern

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<sup>348</sup> Similarly, Jeffrey Peck (13) points out that after Germany's reunification, "in a dramatic realignment, Europe's center moved eastward toward Berlin, the new capital of the united Germany."

European heritage when waves of Russian Jews migrated into Germany and changed the make-up of the German-Jewish community. Their encounter, combined with an already ongoing shift in Holocaust discourse, prompted the shift in self-perception I documented in this study in the literary and filmic texts of German-Jewish authors. The practice of self-Orientalizing, I showed, provided a medium by which to reveal those cracks and fissures that surfaced for Germany's Jews. After all, the opening up of the East not only granted Russian Jews access to the West, but in reverse direction, it also created the opportunity for German Jews to access the sites of former Jewish life from before the Holocaust. Realized through imagistic analogies with past figures – the Oriental Jew and the ghetto – rather than through a physical migratory return – this access is more about “a coming-to-terms with our ‘routes’” than it is about the so-called “return to roots,” as Stuart Hall (QCI 4) defines the minoritarian project of negotiating the narrativization of cultural identity in specific historical and discursive contexts. Thus, the current of Orientalist tropes that permeate the contemporary German-Jewish narrative carries us away into the Jewish ghetto past while it flushes out the routes taken since. By drawing our attention to what has gone lost along the way, these tropes become a means to find grounding in the present. They hinge disparate moments from Jewish history commonly told in separate contexts and emerge at a crucial time in Germany when “Jewish life [in Germany] is now centered in the same space as Jewish memory, both prewar, East German, and post-unification”, to use the words of Jeffrey Peck (162) from his description of “the new German Jew” (161). Lastly, they fill a vacuum that had been created with Western Holocaust etiquette, a politics of Jewish invisibility since 1945,<sup>349</sup> the voiding, with the fall of the wall, of postwar frames of identification, and the overall lack of a Jewish discourse in the old East.

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<sup>349</sup> While this invisibility was a deliberate move on behalf of West Germany's Jews, Jewish

No longer shunning visibility, Germany's Jews draw from notions of Orientalized Jewishness to make their otherness obvious, not only to the outside world, but, importantly, also to themselves.<sup>350</sup> Doing so sets up a dialogue within the Jewish community, as much as it engages the dominant culture in recognizing an otherness it had deemed absent or had squelched. The reappropriation of an alleged otherness on their own terms allows these Jews to gain control over the negative stereotype and disrupt its fixed quality and effects. As the remarkably "unremarkable" (Russian) Jew becomes re-ethnicized, Jews and Germans are discovering cultural diversity in their very midst – the diversity already within us: as individuals; as ethnic groups; or as national communities.

As part of the social imagination, the previously discussed films and literary texts all participate in an important German and European project: finding our place in the post-unification European order as we accommodate our cultural and ethnic particularities.<sup>351</sup> Tasking us to work towards a transnational consciousness beyond national and ethnic borders, the paradigm shift in German-Jewish cultural productions my study identified relies on finding common ground among the various actors without denying differences. If creating such a consciousness is not fully possible in real terms – at least, not quite yet – the literary and filmic imagination produces concrete examples of the kind of transnational connectedness Germans and Europeans may just need. In recouping images of the past, we get to glimpse future

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invisibility in the East (i.e.: in all of the Eastern bloc) was the result of communist ideology and state-sponsored atheism.

<sup>350</sup> Thomas Nolden (118) in his article *A la recherche du Judaïsme perdu: Contemporary Jewish Writing in France* (2007) describes the reversal of a long-standing "assimilationist trajectory" in France and the Jewish revival since the 1960s as the effort to "se faire entendre" versus "se faire oublier".

<sup>351</sup> The Maastricht Treaty of 1992, the treaty that created the European Union, stimulated discussion about culture and identity in Europe. This trend is demonstrated in an increase in cultural programs and programming since then.

possibilities. These texts install the Jewish experience as an example, making it, perhaps, a testing case for acceptance of difference and of affinities that run across geo-political borderlines. The underlying notion of kinship that binds Eastern and Western European Jews together is, conceivably, also a metaphor for our shared humanity, regardless of our national or cultural location.

In conclusion, I want to submit a final observation how the vector of contemporary German-Jewish prose and film promises the elaboration of this transnational consciousness and network for Jews and how it forms a line of continuity between the past, the present, and the future. Illustrating my point are a series of short films by Uri Schneider, a German-Jewish journalist, director, and filmmaker, who splits his time between working in Germany and in Israel. These visual texts serve as one example to demonstrate what I consider a trend in German-Jewish cultural productions. But, before I conduct a cursory analysis of his project, I wish to recapitulate some of the key elements of my argument in light of my claim of continuity.

My discussion of texts from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> centuries proved the East / West dynamics – and the Orientalist aesthetic undergirding it – the driving paradigm in representations of Jewishness. Already in Kompert and Franzos, we find the motif of border crossings, both geographic and cultural, a prominent feature. It derives much of its inspiration from the East / West dynamics and encourages the transnational attitudes I posit in contemporary German-Jewish authors. In mapping out the pockets of Jewish shtetl life, Kompert and Franzos set up a geographic matrix covering much of Eastern Europe and reaching into the West. They negotiate between the pull to permanently cross the ghetto borders via migration into the dominant culture on one hand, and to stay within diaspora zones less defined

by national allegiances than by an inherent kinship, on the other hand. As a result of such movement and tension, Kompert and Franzos draw attention to Jewish identity as the product of specific historical forces and as conditioned by the Jewish minority's positioning in political and national contexts.

This particular point is important to remember when considering the works of Biller, Levy, and Brauner. These contemporary producers of cultural texts build on the East / West trope to expand the notion of a Jewish space in Europe today – a space that had dwindled in dimension and prominence due to the Holocaust, the invisibility of the remaining Jewish communities in the West and, respectively, Jewish assimilation into Soviet communist culture in the East. Their fictional worlds reintroduce a broader Jewish geography and thus make claims of a broader political scope. Much of the political force of their project is tied to Germany and her recent role in the new Europe. Not to be overlooked, the scars of history – the history of Jewish genocide and of German reunification – are still fresh. With this in mind, we are bound to pay special attention to how the cultural location of these Jewish authors in Germany informs their imagination and how these scars come to bear. All three place Germany and German Jews at the center of their project of Jewish rejuvenation and reclamation of a Jewish space. If for Kompert and Franzos Germany and Austria were the exclusive reference point for their Eastern Jewish protagonists, then in Biller, Levy, and Brauner, Germany is the site from where they refashion a Jewish space in Germany and beyond. Unlike in French-Jewish literature, where the experience and culture of the Sephardic-Jewish immigrants from France's former colonies in Northern Africa dominates the Jewish revival Thomas Nolden describes, German-Jewish literature and film orientates towards the East and the former shtetl sites. It seems like an obvious choice given the Ashkenazim-Jewish heritage of German Jewry – a heritage Biller's

own family background epitomizes. While the films and Biller's later stories may be said to be typical for the diaspora experience of minorities in a globalized world, they are also unique. Reclaiming a broader Jewish geography with Germany as a viable Jewish site at the center, German-Jewish writing and film mark a turning point in postwar representations of Jewishness and contribute to a transnational discourse underway in Europe since 1980s.

Without delving into a detailed discussion of Uri Schneider's films, I'd like to flesh out some of the analogies between the authors discussed in this dissertation and Schneider in order to document the overall trajectory. His shorts are commissioned by German public television and aired on several of their stations during prime time with reruns at other times during the day – a solid indicator of the significance attributed to the films.<sup>352</sup> Being part of the public media network, these stations are tasked to produce programming with cultural content that primarily serves the education and information of the German public, but that also entertains.<sup>353</sup> Schneider's films conform perfectly to the stations' mission. He produces realist vignettes of Jewish life in the Germany of the new millennium in the hybrid genre of "Dokumödie."<sup>354</sup> An unfamiliar subject matter for most Germans, the topic of Jewish life today fits in with the educational and cultural as well as informational mandate, whereas the film's formal features promise to have entertainment value. Much like Levy's style in *Alles auf Zucker*, Schneider's

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<sup>352</sup> He works for SWR, 3sat, WRD and ARTE, but his films are also shown on ARD.

<sup>353</sup> The *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* quotes from the state contract for radio and television that the public programming must serve "der Bildung, Information, Beratung und Unterhaltung. Sie haben Beiträge insbesondere zur Kultur anzubieten" ("the education, information, advice [of the public]. They must offer programming on the topic of culture in particular").

<sup>354</sup> Other titles include: "Alles kosher im Cafe" (2008; "All kosher in the Café") and the sequel "Alles kosher in Berlin?" (2010; "All kosher in Berlin?"); "Der Klezmerkönig von Berlin" ("The King of Klezmer of Berlin"; 2013); and "Mit einem Lächeln und einer Träne" (2013; "With a Smile and a Tear"); "Hutmacher with Chuzpe" (2011; "Hatmaker with Chuzpah").

approach stands out for its casual, if not tongue-in-cheek treatment of Jewishness. Staging the everyday with humor, he emplots authentic figures and events in comedic fashion to make accessible to a broad audience what otherwise could be a gloomy portrayal of Jewish struggles to make a life in gentile surroundings. His short film entitled “Bei mir biste scheen” (“To me You’re Beautiful”) from 2013 enacts the trend to cross national borders and create a Jewish network at the European level I outlined in Biller, Ley, and Brauner.

In this 28-minute Dokumödie, Schneider revives a staple of former shtetl life, the matchmaker, around which he creates a lighthearted and amusing story about Jews looking for love. At the heart of the story is Jossi Weber – “eigentlich heisst er Jose, aber auf Jiddisch nennt er sich “Jossi”<sup>355</sup> – from Frankfurt, the only Jewish matchmaker in Germany. A polyglot with a Yiddish accent and allusion to Amy Colin’s multilingual and multicultural Jews from the Bukovina, he holds the fortunes of Jewish singles from Frankfurt and Berlin to Bratislava, Omsk, Paris, New York, Madrid, and the Ukraine in his hands. With more than 800 open cases, Weber’s clients often live far from each other and need his mediating expertise to find a partner. His business, “Agentur Simantov”<sup>356</sup>, fulfills an important function, since many of his clients find it difficult to choose a spouse from the rather limited pool of eligible candidates among the Jewish communities, as is the case in Frankfurt’s 7000 member-strong Jewish community. Weber points out a major problem in the Jewish dating scene: “da kennen sich viele vom Spielen im Sandkasten her und verlieben sich nicht ineinander”<sup>357</sup>.

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<sup>355</sup> “actually, his name is Jose Weber, but in Yiddish, he calls himself “Jossi”

<sup>356</sup> the “Simantov agency”

<sup>357</sup> “many know each other from playing together in the sandbox and don’t fall in love with each other”



As significant as Weber's work might be for his love-seeking bachelors and bachelorettes, his role carries meaning beyond Jewish romance. For one, in recouping the shtetl's matchmaking tradition, Schneider's text joins those of Biller, Levy, and Brauner. All of them are premised on depictions of Jewish traditions and on reintroducing aspects of the Orientalist aesthetic through the use of stereotypes and clichés. In Schneider, the matchmaker figure is an imagistic reference to shtetl traditions – a legendary figure and undoubtedly associated with traditional forms of Jewish life. Franzos, too, had assigned the matchmaker a critical role in *Der Pojaz*. He showed him to be liable not only for sponsoring inter-Jewish marriages, but also for establishing and maintaining bonds between those pockets of Jewish communities spread out across vast expanses. In fact, he belongs to the very kind of images Said holds responsible for transporting Orientalist knowledge into Western society. Similarly and ever so subtle, yet quite tellingly, the film's Yiddish title and Weber's Yiddish first name and accent constitute linguistic nod to the Eastern-Jewish ghetto past and complement imagistic ones.<sup>358</sup> Much like the Yiddish elements in *Kompert* add to the atmosphere and message of the stories, as Krobb (EXM 53) argues, they also enhance the setting of Schneider's story. If Biller, Levy and also Brauner unabashedly draw from the Yiddish linguistic register, so does Schneider.

Secondly, there is a paradox at work in Weber's matchmaking role. From his "cockpit", as Weber calls his Frankfurt office, he communicates with the candidates via skype and email on three computer screens. Facilitating relationships between Jews from different cities,

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<sup>358</sup> Originally, "Bei mir biste scheen" was a song written in 1932 for the Yiddish musical *Men ken lebn nor men lost nisht* by Shalom Secunda and Jacob Jacobs. It gained in popularity through its interpretation by the Andrew Sisters in 1938.

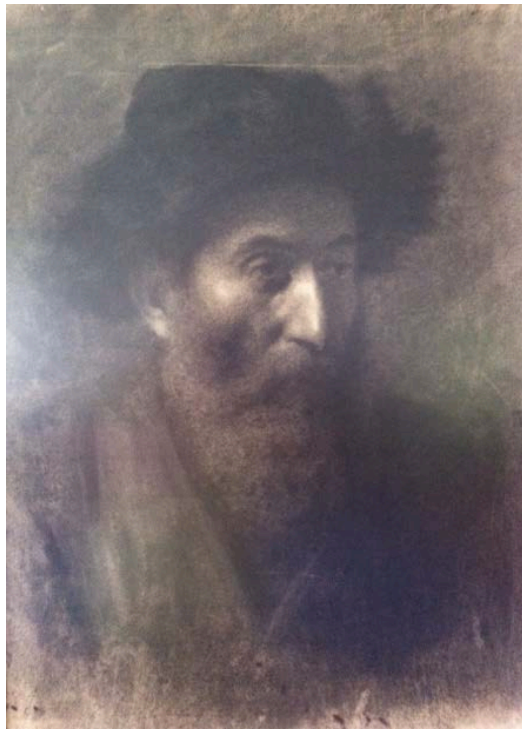
countries, and continents, he operates and manages a transnational network with Germany at the center. Implicitly, he assumes the charge of creating a Jewish future in Germany and Europe – a daring proposal for obvious reasons. If not fully considered in this film, the inclusion of the convert and self-identified Jew Georg from Berlin hints at the possibility of expanding the pool of eligible candidates. Georg turns out to be one of the bachelors from Weber's file cabinet and is a colorful figure: a Jewish gigolo on the lookout for true love with a devout Jewess. The underlying notion of a palpable Jewish presence Schneider suggests, no matter how fragile, ties in with the overall itinerary of the texts I discussed in this study: the transition from Jewish invisibility to visibility, from Jewish absence to Jewish presence, from Jewish museum culture to Jewish culture in the streets. Schneider, like Biller, Levy, and Brauner, pleads for more open and less strained interactions between Germans and Jews, for greater familiarity with and understanding for the other. In this point, these authors want to educate the audience about Jewish otherness without patronizing or moralizing. Instead, they appropriate stereotypes and clichés to envision new possibilities for themselves in the new Europe as Jews at home in different places, possessing multiple, supra-national attachments.

Despite my inquiry's focus on the Jewish example, this examination is relevant to Germany and Europe today beyond its Jewish subject matter. As borders are becoming increasingly blurred and populations are redistributing themselves from within Europe as well as from outside of it, the question of how to construct new identities not narrowly defined by religious or ideological affiliations is ever more pressing. Over the past few decades, the growth in Europe of culturally and ethnically foreign communities from Asia and Africa presents problems for both the majority and the minority cultures. If my inquiry can be taken as a case study by which to measure these problems and weigh possible cultural interventions, then the

challenge before us is to prevent not only the monocultural dominance of the majority, but also the monocultural isolation of the minority.

## APPENDIX A

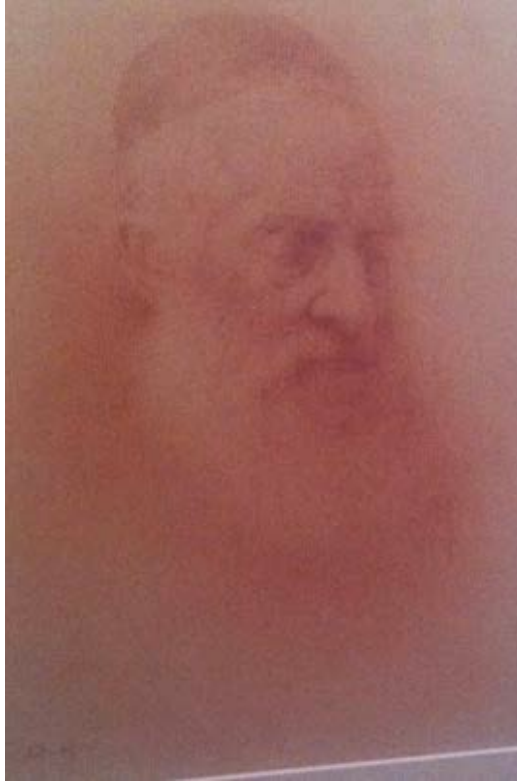
### FIGURES



**Figure 1.** “The Black Jew”, 1897



**Figure 2.** “Yeshiva Boy”, 1915



**Figure 3.** “Old Jew”, undated

The three depictions of the Eastern shtetl Jew are the work of Austrian-Jewish painter David Kohn (Vienna) from the 1890s through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He would invite Jews he had seen in the streets of Vienna (most likely recent arrivals from the East) to his studio to be painted. Kohn was a favorite of Emperor Franz Josef I and did his portrait. The paintings are today at the home of the painter’s granddaughter, Frieda Wells, in New York.

## APPENDIX B

### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BT Biller, Maxim. Bernsteintage. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2004.
- CDI Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Rutherford, Jonathan, ed. Identity: Community, Culture, Difference. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990. 222-37.
- EE Berman, Russell A. Enlightenment or Empire. Colonial Discourse in German Culture. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.
- EZ Berman, Russell A. "Der Ewige Zweite. Deutschlands Sekundärkolonialismus". Kundrus, Birthe, ed. Phantasiereiche. Zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2003. 19-32.
- EXM Krobb, Florian. "Between Exile and Assimilation: Language and Identity in German-Jewish Texts around 1848." Coulson, Anthony, ed. Exiles and Migrants: Crossing Thresholds in European Culture and Society. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1997. 43-55.
- GIT Goektuerk, Deniz, David Gramling, Anton Kaes, eds. Germany in Transit. Nation and Migration 1955-2005. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- GJ Biller, Maxim. Der Gebrauchte Jude. Selbstportrait. Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 2011.
- GW Krobb, Florian. "Reclaiming the Location: Leopold Kompert's Ghetto Fiction in Post-Colonial Perspective." Eds Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb. Ghetto Writing. Traditional and Eastern Jewry in German-Jewish Literature from Heine to Hilsenrath. Rochester: Camden House, 1999.
- JF Bodemann, Michal Y. A Jewish Family in Germany Today. An Intimate Portrait. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

- JGM Bodemann, Michal Y., ed. *Jews, Germans, Memory. Reconstructions of Jewish Life in Germany*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996.
- LT Biller, Maxim. Love Today. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009.
- LVV Biller, Maxim. Land der Väter und Verräter. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994.
- M Krobb, Florian. "Kompert, Leopold." Kilcher, Andreas B., ed. Metzler Lexikon der Deutsch-Jüdischen Literatur. Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2000. 329-331.
- MG Biller, Maxim. Moralische Geschichten. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2005.
- ML Hess, Jonathan M. Middlebrow Literature and the Making of German-Jewish Identity. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.
- TJ Biller, Maxim. Die Tempojahre. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992.  
WRT Biller, Maxim. Wenn ich einmal reich und tot bin. Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2011.
- QCI Hall, Stuart. "Who Needs Identity?" Questions of Cultural Identity. Hall, Stuart and Paul Du Gay, eds. London: Sage Publications, 1996. 1-17.



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